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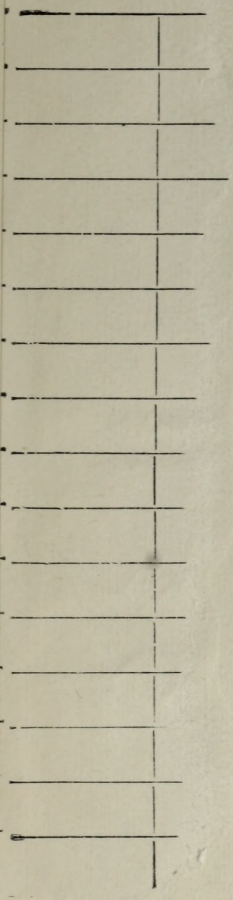
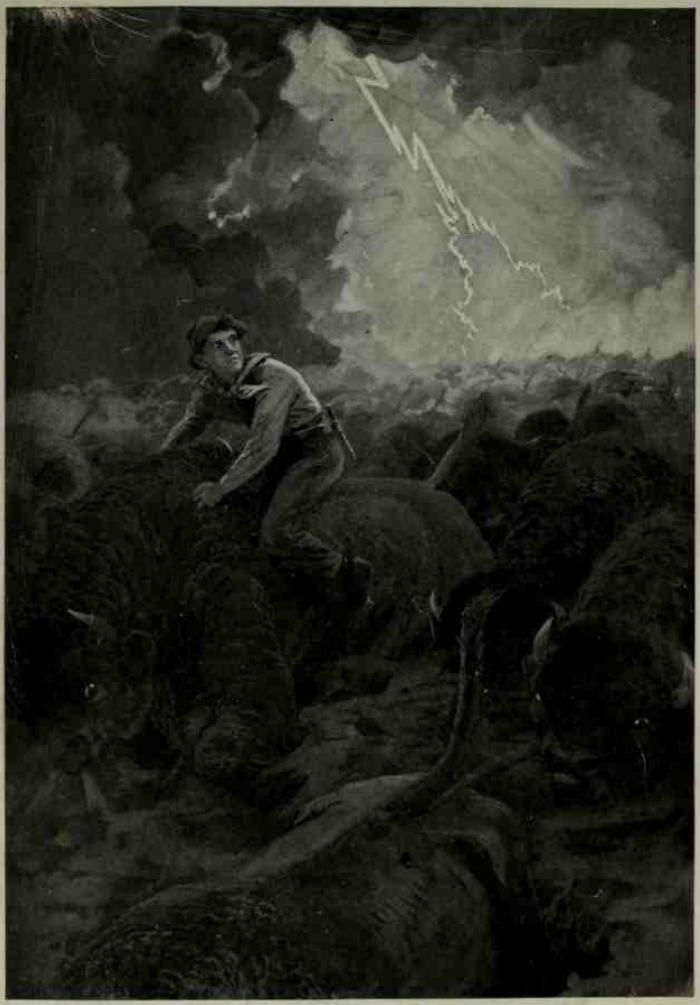


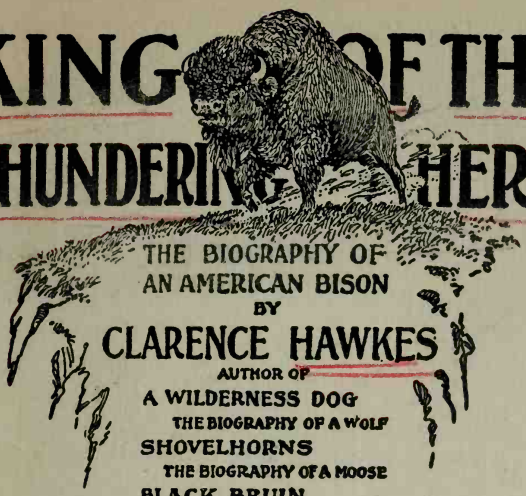
THE KING OF THE THUNDERING HERD

The Biography of an American Bison



He Set His Teeth and Gripped the Buffalo with His Legs

KING OF THE THUNDERING HERD



THE BIOGRAPHY OF
AN AMERICAN BISON

BY

CLARENCE HAWKES

AUTHOR OF

A WILDERNESS DOG
THE BIOGRAPHY OF A WOLF

SHOVELHORNS
THE BIOGRAPHY OF A MOOSE

BLACK BRUIN
THE BIOGRAPHY OF A BEAR

SHAGGYCOAT
THE BIOGRAPHY OF A BEAVER

etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

CHARLES COPELAND

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Dedicated to

MY FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN BISON SOCIETY

and is written in hopes that the tragic story of the Buffalo, which so closely parallels that of the red man, may awaken both your interest and your sympathy, so that you may help in the work of our society in reclaiming the King of the Plains for the North American continent

Follett 1.14

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INTRODUCTORY

THE KING OF THE PLAINS

INTRODUCTORY

THE KING OF THE PLAINS

At the opening of the last century, and even as late as 1871, when the Union Pacific Railroad cleft the great herds asunder, there roamed upon the vast American plains, stretching from the Alleghany Mountains to the Rockies, and from the Mexican border to the Hudson Bay country, probably the most inconceivable herd of wild animals ever ranging upon a single continent. This almost countless herd was formed of hundreds of millions of American bison, or buffalo, as they were indiscriminately called.

The bison ranged even farther from the great plains than has been indicated, for in Colonial times they were found in small numbers in Western New York and Penn-

sylvania, while they penetrated through the Rockies to the Cascade range, so that they were quite plentiful in parts of Oregon. They also crossed the border into Mexico, while they frequently wandered as far north as the Arctic circle. Generally speaking, however, their range was the great American plains, bounded by its eastern and western mountain chains, and by the Mexican border on the south, and the Saskatchewan River on the north.

Early in the last century Boone, Crocket, and their kind, together with other settlers, crossed the Alleghany Mountains to the eastern portion of the great plains, and the war upon the bison began. All the buffalo that the settlers killed and all that the Indians could take with their primitive means, however, were not as one grain of sand from the seashore, so vast was the herd. An Indian, in describing to a white trapper the prevalence of bison in a certain part of

the west, said in his picturesque language that the country was one buffalo robe, from East to West, from North to South.

Even as late as the early seventies, an army officer in riding through the Dakotas and Montana traveled for six weeks without losing sight of buffalo. No matter whether it was morning, midday, or evening, upon the crest of a swell, or in a coulee, the vast rolling plains were always dotted with buffalo. Buffalo standing up and lying down, some eating grass and others contentedly chewing their cuds, but always buffalo. Another army officer tells of his experience farther south, in Arkansas, where he encountered a portion of the southern herd. This herd was fairly compact and moving rapidly, and as near as he could estimate, was seventy miles long, and thirty miles wide. For three days the bison galloped by, while a squad of puny American soldiers cowered in a sheltering ravine, not daring

to stir outside for fear that they would be trampled to death under the hoofs of the migrating herd.

As late as 1874 a train upon the Union Pacific Railroad was held up for nine hours while a herd crossed the tracks, and this was after the war of extermination had gone on for several years, and the herds had become partially depleted.

For twelve years, beginning in 1871, when the Union Pacific Railroad cut the herd in sunder and sounded its death-knell, the war went on. Millions of hides were obtained each year, while as many more rotted on the plains without being taken from their wearers. No such colossal tragedy in the animal kingdom was ever known upon a single continent.

The bleaching bones of the bison were as common a sight upon the great plains as are the stones upon our rock-strewn New England acres. In parts of the West it has

been an industry to collect these bones for the lime that they contain. A single city, which was headquarters for the shipment of these white reminders of the great herd, sent out in a single year the bones of thirty-nine million bison.

Is it any wonder that to-day there is actually not one bison where there were a million in 1860? From being the greatest herd of wild animals that the world probably ever saw, the bison have diminished to a few hundred semi-domesticated buffalo, dwarfed in stature in many cases and pitiful in their numerical weakness.

Even in the Yellowstone Park, where the government has made every effort to protect them, the pot hunter and the lawless despoiler have pursued the poor bison. In 1890 there were four hundred scattered about the large confines of the park, and now, in spite of the efforts of the government, there are barely a hundred.

To place the entire number of buffalo upon this continent to-day, counting those in public parks, government reservations, those in private domains, and a few who still range wild in the region of the Peace River, at five hundred head would probably be putting the figure too high.[1]

This is the sorry story of the American bison, and when we consider that this slaughter was most of it accomplished in twelve years, from 1871 to 1883, we can form some idea of the tremendous tragedy, the like of which has never been seen before or since.

First among the causes that led to the extermination of the mighty host we will have to place the coming of the railroad to the great plains. When those two racing gangs of men, one carrying the glittering rails east, and the other west, met upon

[1] This statement refers to conditions in 1908. Now there are about two thousand bison on the North American continent.

the vast American desert, the event sounded the knell of the bison. The mighty herd that had hitherto surged northward and southward, with the change of season, was then cut asunder, and was never again united.

Occasionally trains were held up on the Union Pacific for half a day while a herd of comparatively few numbers crossed the tracks, but these were small bands, when compared with the whole mighty phalanx, and their migrations were merely temporary.

Before the coming of the railroad there had been no object in killing large numbers of buffalo. A man could pack out only half a dozen, or at most a dozen skins upon a pony, and as the price was only a dollar a skin, it did not pay; but when the railroad solved the transportation difficulties, and the companies still paid a dollar per robe, it was different. A lazy man who

did not care to do hard work could shoot from forty to seventy-five buffalo per day. He could procure skinners who would work very cheaply, and the railroad did the rest. Shortly after the coming of the Union Pacific to the great plains, the southern herd was split by another railroad, and all its favorite feeding-grounds thrown open to the hunters. Then the slaughter began. Buffalo robes were seen piled up at all the stations along the road, like cord-wood, and they were shipped east by carloads. Buffalo bones became as common upon the plains as the bison themselves had been before. It took only about three years for the hordes of hunters and the railroads to slaughter the southern herds. But a few survivors could be found upon the outlying deserts of Texas in the late seventies.

In connection with the slaughter of the southern herd, a very remarkable incident in specialization was noted, which illus-

trates how rapidly nature can work when she is obliged to. Old hunters in Texas reported in about 1875 that a new species of buffalo had appeared in the state. They were taller and longer legged, and did not ever become fat like the old species. Some of the hunters said that this new buffalo had come up from Mexico, but the truth was at last discovered. This was merely a new form of the same harassed old species, adapting itself to new conditions. The bison was now so continually upon the run that he did not have time to get fat, while this tended also to develop the length of his legs, and his speed. Thus in fifteen or twenty years, under this high pressure, nature created what old hunters had deemed a new species of buffalo.

The northern herd which inhabited more difficult country to hunt held its own better, and was not wholly slaughtered until about 1883. Here also rapid specialization was

noted, for the remnants of this herd took to the mountains and became almost as expert mountain climbers as the bighorn sheep. So marked was this characteristic of these bison after a few years that they were also set off in a class by themselves, being called the Mountain Bison.

The mountain-climbing accomplishments of these harassed buffalo were almost beyond belief. To see a buffalo bull who would weigh nearly two thousand pounds going up an almost perpendicular cliff like a Rocky Mountain sheep was a not uncommon sight. The few now living in the Yellowstone Park inhabit the mountains almost entirely and so are rarely seen by travelers, or even by hunters.

In the destruction of the northern herd the steamboats plying up and down the Missouri River played an important part. Here again upon the docks at the different towns along the river bank, robes were piled

high, just as they had been upon the station platforms along the southern railroads.

From point to point the poor bison were driven, taking refuge in one fastness after another, only to be hunted out at last and pushed farther on into the wilderness, finally to disappear entirely from the continent where once they had been as the grains of sand upon the seashore.

One of the last slaughters was perpetrated by the government itself. After General Custer's wholesale defeat in the battle of the Little Big-horn, the government decided that the only way to subdue the Indian was to destroy his means of subsistence. Accordingly, the bison were followed by the troopers into their last strongholds and while wallowing belly-deep in the snow, were shot down by the thousands.

Finally a few scattered bands, fragments of the great herds, crossed the borders of the United States into what is now the

Canadian Northwest, but even here the settlers took toll of them as they went, so that to-day buffalo bones are almost as much a landmark on the prairies of Saskatchewan as in Montana. Farther and farther north the poor fugitives fled, putting on longer, thicker coats as they went, to meet the rigor of the northern climate, until to-day perhaps a hundred bison, known as the Wood Buffalo, are to be found in the Peace River district of Athabasca, the humiliated Lord of the Plains taking refuge in the lonely land of the Muskeg.

To the Indian the buffalo was not only the staff of life, being his most easily obtainable meat for the entire year, but also out of his massive hulk came nearly all of the red man's utensils, his weapons, his garments and his shelter. So was it any wonder that the Pawnees said that "through the bison and the corn we worship the father," or that in some way the buffalo en-

tered into the religious ceremonies of nearly all the plain Indians? The members of the deer family were whimsical, often changing their feeding-grounds, but the bison could always be found upon the great plains.

In the early primitive days the Indian stalked the bison on foot, but later when he became possessed of firearms and ponies, he resorted to the more exciting sport of hunting on horseback. So skilful was the red man with his bow, that he has been known to send an arrow through two buffaloes, who were running side by side.

But when there was a large tribe of several hundred lodges to feed, the piskun was resorted to. This manner of killing buffalo is described later in the story.

Piles of buffalo bones upon the plains are frequently found even to-day, marking the site of some old piskun.

But the red man rarely killed more buf-

falo than he could use, and you will readily believe this when I enumerate the things for which these wild plains cattle were used.

The robe was the Indian's winter blanket, and the skin freed from hair his summer covering or sheet. The dressed hide was made into all kinds of clothing. Dressed cow skins covered the lodges which formed a lighter and warmer shelter than the white man has ever been able to invent.

Braided strips of rawhide made them ropes and lines, smaller cords were also made from the braided hair.

Cannon-bones and ribs were used to make implements to dress hides. Shoulder-blades lashed to sticks made axes and hoes. The ribs furnished runners for small sleds. The green hide was often used as a kettle in which to boil meat. If they stretched it over boughs, it made a small boat for crossing rivers. The tough hide from the bull's

neck stretched over a frame made a shield which would turn arrows or a lance thrust.

From the hoofs, glue was made just as the white man manufactures it, and the Indian used it to fasten the heads and feathers upon his arrows.

Hair was used to stuff cushions and later on, when the Indians became more civilized, saddles. The long black beard under the bull's chin furnished strands of hair to ornament shields and quivers.

Horns were fashioned into spoons and ladles and drinking-cups, and also ornamented their war-bonnets. The lining of the paunch was fashioned into a water bucket. The skin of the hind leg cut off at the hock and again at the pastern was used for a moccasin or rude boot.

Fly-brushes, gun-covers, saddle-cloths, bow cases, quivers and knife-sheaths, and scores of other useful things were all furnished by the bison, none of whose huge hulk went

to waste in the hands of the ingenious Indian.

Gone are the old days and ways. The bison has entirely disappeared from the plains, and the Indian is confined to his reservations. The vast herds that swarmed the plains whose numbers were like the stars are now almost entirely extinct. Cattle have taken their places in the Bad Lands which were their last grazing-grounds, an extensive agriculture has covered the great plains with wheat and corn, and this is probably for the best.

The bison was the red man's beef; when he disappeared and the white man came, there was no longer the urgent need for his existence. Cattle were better suited to the needs of the whites, and both herds could not graze upon the same pasture-lands.

But to all those who love nature in her wild, primitive state, who love the barbarity and the grandeur of untamed life, there

will ever be a fascination in thinking of the thundering herd that shook the plains like an earthquake in its passing, now gone forever. To such there will always come wistful thoughts of the old days when the King of the Plains reigned over the greatest kingdom ever vouchsafed to a wild beast.

CHAPTER I

CROSSING THE GREAT PLAINS

The King of the Thundering Herd

CHAPTER I

CROSSING THE GREAT PLAINS

Bennie Anderson sat on the lee side of the prairie schooner, watching the dancing camp-fire, and listening to the howling of the coyotes.

Three months before, this diabolical, many-keyed chorus that came from a distant butte, would have filled him with terror, but now it had no fears for him. He was getting used to the sights and sounds of the frontier, for he was a pioneer, going into the wild, desolate country with the rest of the family in search of a new home.

Three months before he would have said that this babel of sound, rising and falling upon the prairie stillness, was made by at least fifty coyotes. There were voices, high-keyed and low-keyed, mournful and pathetic, wavering and quavering, as though these small wolves were holding a wake for a beloved comrade. But Bennie now knew, thanks to his father's teachings, that this night chorus was probably made by a pair of coyotes who were serenading the moon according to their night custom.

This watching the bright camp-fire was a favorite pastime of the boy's and was what he had done every night since they had started upon this wonderful journey. The camp-fire was full of pictures that came and went with the dancing flames. Besides, there was companionship in the camp-fire and protection from the many dangers of the desolate prairies that encompassed them.

Four months before the Anderson family, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, Thomas, a boy of nine years, and the solitary watcher by the camp-fire, named Benjamin, aged eleven years, had said good-bye to Indiana.

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Ill luck had always followed the Andersons in that state, and Bennie's father had said that perhaps a change of scene would also change their luck. So nearly all their belongings had been packed into the canvas-covered wagon, two dilapidated mules hitched to it, the old cow tied behind, and with the dog following beneath the wagon or capering about as best suited his fancy, they had left the tumble-down cabin and the Indiana homestead, and had started for the frontier beyond the Mississippi. In the same manner their ancestors had left Western New York, and started for the Middle West two generations before.

You must not imagine for a moment that

this was in 1910, for it was not. Had it been the twentieth century, they would have gone upon a train, and there would have been no wild frontier in what is now Nebraska and Dakota. But it was in 1871, that eventful summer when those two racing gangs of men carried the approaching sections of the Union Pacific Railroad to a splendid completion, and spiked down the last gleaming rail of a system that spanned a continent.

It was a summer when great things were in the air, events far-reaching in their consequences to the vast plains, and perhaps the boy of eleven years vaguely felt them as he sat brooding by the camp-fire.

Anyhow, it had been a wonderful summer to him, and he was fond of thinking over all the strange objects that he had seen, as he watched the flames leap high, or the embers of the camp-fire slowly die out. His life hitherto had been so un-

eventful and he had seen so little of the world that even now it seemed more like a strange dream than a stirring reality, and it would not have much astonished Bennie to have suddenly awakened to the fact that he was back in his bed in the loft of the log-cabin in Indiana.

It had been a very late, cold spring, with raw winds and drizzling rains, but at last Chinnook had come out of the south and breathed over the prairies and all had been changed as by magic.

The birds began singing as though they would split their throats, and through the waiting earth went that instantaneous thrill, seen in a few hours, in springing grass and opening buds, and in the gracious warmth of the sun. The coming of Chinnook had been agreed upon as the signal for the start, so the following day everything had been made ready. Mr. Anderderson had cracked the whip over the backs

of the two rusty mules and the strange procession, old Brindle bringing up the rear, had started upon its long trip across what was then, for at least a part of the way, a wild and desolate country.

All the exultant sounds of spring were in the air. The hoarse, glad cry of the woodcock was heard in the bottom-lands, and the more rasping note of the jack-snipe came up from the marshes. Killdeer whistled in the uplands; the cardinal exulted in the sumac; and many a shy little songster greeted the passers-by from bramble or thicket.

The swift-moving wedge of wild geese went honking by overhead; and though the sound was not musical, it was exultant, and stirred the blood like a bugle-call to arms. The long-legged sand-hill crane wheeled in the upper air, and the sun was often fairly darkened with scudding flocks of chattering wood-pigeons.

The ducks too were all winging their way northward to their summer breeding-grounds, and they could be seen at morning and evening feeding in all the bayous and lagoons, and upon the slow running creeks that, fringed with small cotton-woods, wound in and out through the low-lands. There were many kinds of ducks, some of them, like the Harlequin and the wood duck, gay in their brilliant plumage, while others were more sober in grays and browns. But among the social company which gabbled as they fed were goodly mallards, and red-eyes, yellow-eyes and canvass-backs, all fat from their sojourn in the South where there was the very best of living just to be had for the taking.

Mr. Anderson was an old hunter, and as there were two rifles in the wagon, not to mention an old shotgun, there was usually plenty of fresh duck or prairie chicken to eat. The rivers swarmed with fish which

were also added to the menu of the Andersons.

Bennie was particularly fond of fishing and hunting, and as the smaller of the two rifles was his, he did his share in keeping the larder well filled.

Prairie chickens were easily located at this time of the year, as the cocks were much in evidence, standing about upon conspicuous hillocks, swelling out their ruffs and sending their booming love-notes far across the rolling prairies. At such times it was a fairly easy matter to stalk them, if one did not mind crawling a dozen rods or so upon his belly.

But the sweetest of all the sounds heard upon the broad, rolling prairies,—one that always came with the first rays of the sun in the east,—was the tumultuous outpouring of the prairie larks, the sweetest of all the western singers. This brown bunch of gladness would mount up into the cloudless

sky until it was no longer visible, pouring out its joyous song as it went. Long after it had been lost sight of, one could still hear the wonderful rhapsody, clear as crystal, and as persistent as the sound of a fountain, pouring down through the clear morning air. Even in Illinois, before they crossed the Mississippi, and came into the domain of the buffalo, evidences of the great herds could be discovered, for there was still occasionally to be found the plain outlines of a buffalo-wallow that the plough had skipped, or the slight traces of some old bison trail through parts of the prairie that had been latest claimed by the plough. But in the main all signs of the King of the Plains had disappeared east of the Mississippi River.

It must not be imagined, however, that the sights and sounds of the prairies were all that claimed the attention of the two Anderson boys on this remarkable trip.

Their Indiana home had been located in an out-of-the-way portion of one of the most sparsely settled counties of the Hoosier State, so Bennie had seen very little of the outside world.

To him the towns and cities that they passed through were all like wonderland. He had never even seen a train until this trip.

Illinois was not then a lacework of railroads as it is now, and many of the farmers still drew their wheat fifteen or twenty miles to the nearest depot. Corn had not then entirely supplanted wheat, so that the state was not one waving corn-field as it is to-day.

But it was the plan of Mr. Anderson to avoid the larger towns and cities, and to keep to the country, where there was more hospitality and kindness for emigrants like themselves.

The crossing of the great Mississippi

River upon a splendid bridge was a never-to-be-forgotten event to the boys, and when a section of the bridge was swung round to let a steamboat pass through, their astonishment knew no bounds.

Finally the towns and cities of the Mississippi valley were gradually left behind and the slow-moving canvas-covered wagon, going at the snail's pace set by old Brindle, got out of civilization into the Bad Lands of Northern Missouri.

Here there was an unending variety of scenery, and every day brought some new animal or remarkable feature of the landscape to Bennie's observing eyes.

Among his most cherished possessions was a very good field-glass, which had been the property of an uncle who had used it in the Civil War. This glass proved to be the boy's best ally upon the great plains, where the stretches of smooth land are so vast, and the distances so great, that the naked eye is

wholly inadequate to the demands made upon it, especially if one wants to see all the wild life upon the plains as Bennie did.

Strangest of the features of the landscape were the buttes, queer little hills rising sharply from the plains to an altitude of fifty to one hundred feet. Sometimes, in the drier portions of the plains they were quite barren, but in other places they were rather luxuriant. Many of them showed rock formation, and some were so fantastic as to suggest that they had been made by man.

Then there were the small canyons,—great cracks from ten to fifty feet wide, running through the plains for miles. Their team was often obliged to follow such a depression for a long time before finding a place where they could cross to the other side. Perhaps there was a creek at the bottom of the canyon, or maybe it was quite dry and dusty. If the ravine was wooded and contained water, it was called a coulee.

The watercourses, which usually consisted of sluggish creeks, could always be seen a long way off, by small cottonwoods that usually fringed them. The water problem was often a very serious one upon the parched, desert-like portions of the prairie, and on two occasions they were obliged to travel for half the night before coming to water. It was always necessary to camp by a creek so that they could have water for both man and beast.

Deer and bear were quite plentiful in the Missouri Bad Lands, and the boys were always upon the lookout for game of any sort, partly because they could call the attention of their father to it, and thus secure fresh meat for their larder, and also because they enjoyed the excitement. Their young eyes, especially those of Bennie, soon became very sharp to spy out game. The field-glass, in the use of which he soon became expert, always stood him in good stead

for seeing things on the vast plains. He soon learned to spy out the antelope as they fed or scurried over the smooth prairies. Of all the members of the deer family, this is the shyest, and the hardest to approach, and try as they would, neither Mr. Anderson nor Bennie could kill an antelope. The animal's stratagem was always to keep the hunter in sight. They did not much care if you saw them, provided they also saw you, but they were pretty sure to keep a half a mile between you and them. So as soon as you approached too near, they were off like the wind, running as only an antelope can. Through the glass Bennie could see them quite plainly and their brindle faces, their large bulging eyes, and their graceful pronged horns gave them a queer look. The antelope is the only member of the deer family with hollow horns, and they shed them in the same manner as the flat horn varieties.

On one occasion Bennie observed some queer maneuvres by about twenty antelope, who were galloping to and fro like wild horses. Suddenly they would all stop and stand stock still, each with his head held in the same position. Then of one accord they were off running side by side, or in file as the case might be, until they were again suddenly halted by their leader. Sometimes they would turn upon a pivot, wheeling like cavalry, to go off like the wind in a new direction. These strange tactics they kept up for nearly an hour, until the schooner was out of sight of them.

In many of the slopes of the rolling plains there were towns of prairie dogs, queer little chaps about the size of a half-grown woodchuck, and looking something like a small chucky. If the team went too near to their town, they would set up a great yelping and barking, each sitting upon his tail near his hole, and at the sound of a gun, all would

go scurrying in like a flash. It is almost impossible to shoot one and get him. Even when mortally wounded, he will wriggle into his hole.

The prairie dog town is constantly enlarged on the outside, and so in time the holes at the heart of the town become deserted. The boys finally discovered that these deserted holes were occupied by queer little owls, who would stand by their front doors winking and blinking in the blazing sunlight. These empty dog-burrows were also inhabited by rattlesnakes, whose ugly lengths could be plainly seen through the glass, coiled up basking in the sunlight.

There were also now many signs of the buffalo :—gleaming skulls and huge skeletons that told their sad story, as well as occasionally a real live bison ; but of these I will speak in the following chapter.

Of birds there were not so many as there

had been in Indiana. The black, scolding magpie, first cousin to the whiskey jack, was much in evidence, and ducks were frequently seen along the creeks by the cottonwoods.

One evening they surprised an old duck and her brood, ten tiny little corks, bobbing about upon the water. They were as buoyant as bubbles, but the Andersons did not have long to watch them, for the old duck soon led them away into the reeds.

Other birds there were whose names the boys did not know. These were pecking away upon the wild plums, or eating weed-seeds, but all seemed quite sociable, and not a bit wild.

At first Bennie had been almost terrified at the vast stretches of brown, sear plains, so silent and so lifeless that it seemed as though there was not a living thing upon them. Sometimes the Andersons would

travel for hours, without seeing a sign of life unless the glass was used, and then they merely noted some brown spots upon the far-away plains. The Spirit of the Plains was a very silent and unapproachable spirit, a being that wandered without sound or form, without color, or any perceptible shape, yet brooding silently over all. You always felt, rather than saw it,—a very apparent presence, yet always eluding sight and hearing.

It deceived your eyes in regard to distance upon the plains, and it caused sound to travel very far. It laid a weird spell upon all things. It was a new experience to the Andersons, but gradually all came to love the spirit of the desert, and to miss it when they passed again into the broken Bad Lands.

All these things and many more Bennie saw each night as he gazed into the dancing camp-fire, and it was like living each

day over again in the mysterious evening. Somehow he could not blot them out, and they would come in spite of him;—the vast stretches of rolling prairies, the antelope, the coyotes, like those that were now making the night hideous; the bleaching buffalo bones, the buttes, the canyons, the cottonwoods, the cloudless blue sky, intense and pitiless. All came and went in the dancing firelight.

"Benjamin, Benjamin," called the boy's mother, thrusting her head out of a slit in the canvas. "You stop dreaming and come to bed this minute."

"Yes, mother," replied the boy, heaving a deep sigh. "I am coming."

The dreams in the dancing camp-fire were so much more pleasant than those in the schooner that he hated to leave them. But his mother's word was law, so after putting a little more fuel upon the fire, he climbed into the wagon, where the boys and their

mother slept, and was soon peacefully snoring, while the coyotes outside still kept up their dismal song to the new moon as it sailed over a distant butte.

CHAPTER II

THE THUNDERING HERD

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THE modest Anderson caravan had not journeyed far into the Missouri Bad Lands, at right angles to the old Oregon Trail, which so many adventurers had followed before and have since, before the signs of buffalo became very plentiful, although the boys did not at first recognize them.

The first buffalo trail that they discovered greatly astonished the boys and gave them some idea of the immense numbers of bison that must have traveled that way, to wear it so deep in the soil.

It was a well-defined path leading from one feeding-ground to another, or perhaps to the salt-lick, or to water. So many hoofs had passed that way that the trail

was worn two feet deep into the soil, and where the earth was particularly soft, it was three feet deep. Some old buffalo trails are frequently seen in soft places, where the backs of the buffalo would have just shown above the earth as they traveled.

Then there were trees, cottonwoods usually, that had been so persistently rubbed against in years gone by that the bark was all worn off, and in some cases the trees were nearly dead from the continual friction.

If a boulder could be found which stood three or four feet above the ground, that also made a good rubbing-post, and around such stones the ground would be trodden down until a path was made three feet deep.

One writer tells of the great annoyance that the railroads experienced when they first came into the country, through the continual rubbing of the buffalo upon the telegraph poles. Finally a section boss said

he would put a stop to it; so he filled several poles with spikes. Examinations of these particular poles a few days later showed that they had been used much more than before the spikes were driven in, the spike-filled poles making a fine curry-comb for the buffalo. This rubbing process is also common among domestic cattle, especially in the spring, when they are shedding their old coats. In this season of the year the buffalo's coat, which is long and thick, often hangs in shreds or matted masses a foot or two in length, and it is to get rid of these encumbrances that the buffalo take to the rubbing-posts.

Then there were the buffalo-wallows, places fifty or sixty feet across, where the bison had worn out a sort of basin by rolling and wallowing in the mud. Sometimes these wallows were entirely dry, and often they were grassed over, but you could always see the ridge at the edge of the wal-

low. Fairy rings they are also sometimes called by the frontiersman.

But the most striking of all the buffalo signs were the gleaming skulls and the pathetic skeletons which the sun and the rains had polished white as ivory, and which could be seen for a long distance on the prairies. These grim reminders of the great herd could often be seen for a mile through the glass and even half that distance with the naked eye, looking like a faint white glimmer.

One night when it was cold and chilly and the Andersons had had to camp in a very forlorn desert portion of the prairies, far from wood and unfortunately also from water, Mr. Anderson came into camp bringing an armful of buffalo chips. These were hard, dry cakes of buffalo dung, that had long baked in the sun. The boys were very much astonished, and wondered what he intended to do with them, but they were

soon enlightened. Their father arranged the chips just as you would faggots for a camp-fire, and soon had a bright blaze glowing. In addition to giving a very fair blaze, they also emitted a slight odor, which kept away the mosquitoes. That night the Andersons not only cooked their supper by the fire from the chips, but this fuel kept them warm and made the immediate circle of their camp-fire bright and cheerful until they turned in.

It is noticeable all through nature that fire and light, which come from combustion, are symbolic of comfort and cheer. The sun, our source of light and heat, is the very embodiment of good cheer. How dark and dismal the old world becomes when he hides his face. What an exultant thrill runs through the fields and forest when he darts his first rosy shafts of light over the eastern hills, at once glorifying the earth. The moon and the stars are our

comfort by night, and how depressing is a moonless, starless night. By the light of the stars and the moon we get some idea of the immensity of the universe, which even the surpassing brightness of the sun does not reveal. Even when we come down to the warmth and cheer of an open fireplace, or better still a camp-fire, we see how necessary to man's comfort are warmth and light.

The first glimpse that the Andersons had of a real live buffalo was just at sunset. Sunset and twilight come rather suddenly upon the plains, just as they do upon the ocean. The sober-going prairie schooner was plodding along, making the last mile or two before they would camp for the night, when Bennie, who was always upon the lookout for wild life, descried a massive dark form clearly outlined against the sunset sky.

The field-glass was at once brought into play and the distant object proved to be a

gigantic buffalo bull. He was standing chewing his cud, in a ruminating manner, and looking off across the rolling prairies to the distant sunset, or so it seemed to the watchers with the glass.

Although he was perhaps a quarter of a mile away, yet the glass brought him quite near, so that they could study him and get a good idea of just how the King of the Plains looked. His head and shoulders were very massive, and almost out of proportion to his hind-quarters, but not enough so to look badly. A long black beard, perhaps a foot in length, hung down beneath his chops, while his massive head was generously ornamented with long dark curly hair that nearly hid his large, ox-like eyes. His horns were short and sharp, and slightly curved upward, suggesting what execution he could do if he were suddenly to throw up his great head, and catch his victim upon the horns.

The hump upon his shoulders seemed to be a natural sequence from his massive head and thick neck, which would need just such fore-quarters to support them. His hind-quarters were rather slight, compared with his fore-quarters, and were adorned with a short, sparsely-haired tail, which usually stuck straight up when the bison galloped over the plains at his best pace.

The entire robe of the King, aside from the black markings, was a deep rich brown, which certain times of the year has a fine gloss. That the coat was thick and warm, suitable to shield its wearer from the most extreme cold, could also be plainly seen through the glass.

So well is the buffalo protected by his splendid coat, that a calf that was dropped in Northern Dakota in February, with the thermometer forty below zero, did not seem to mind the cold reception that he had at

the hands of nature upon his appearance in the world.

It was a never-to-be-forgotten picture, of the old King standing upon the crest of a distant swell, chewing his cud, while the westering sun surrounded him with a halo and painted the sky above him in most gorgeous colors. The boys gazed at him with wondering eyes until the after-glow faded, and the dark figure on the crest of the swell was merged in the gathering gloom.

The next glimpse of the bison was likewise just at dusk. They had turned out of their course, going nearly five miles to the south for wood and water. These they found upon the banks of a broad brawling river, which proved to be none other than the Missouri. At this point it was lined by high bluffs, partially wooded. On the northern bank, from which the Andersons approached, the slope was gradual as the country fell away to the river for half a

mile, but on the bank across, which was the Kansas side, it was much more precipitate, there probably being one hundred feet fall to three hundred feet slope, which made it very steep. Here the banks were not wooded, but composed of sand and small cobblestones, the work of the water for countless ages, with here and there a large boulder.

Just as the wagon reached the northern bank, a buffalo bull came out upon the top of the bluff at the other side of the river, and, after looking down the steep descent for a few seconds, to the astonishment of the watching emigrants on the other side, began slowly to descend.

The bank was so steep that it almost seemed as though he would be pitched headlong, but he dug in his hoofs, and went sliding and slipping for fifteen or twenty feet, carrying down a small avalanche of sand and cobblestones with him.

At the first convenient projection he stopped to rest, and to pick out the best going for the next twenty feet. Then he would slowly start, slipping and sliding again.

At last by dint of many stops, he reached a point within fifty feet of the bottom, but the rest of the way was very steep, and here he paused, uncertain what to do next. Finally he concluded that the only thing to do was to go on, so with a grand slip and a slide that carried down tons of earth with him, he reached the bottom in a cloud of dust.

Having attained his goal at so much labor, he seemed determined to get his money's worth, so wallowed about in the shallow water near the shore, drinking and blowing the water from his nose for half an hour. Finally he began slowly to ascend just as he had come down.

As in the descent, the fifty feet nearest the river was the most difficult, and this

he made with a great rush, which seemed fairly to wind him as he stood panting and blowing at the first stopping-place for five minutes. At last, however, he seemed to get his wind, for he again began slowly to ascend and finally reached the top. Here he turned for a last look over the landscape where twilight was falling fast upon the prairie beyond.

Finally he faced about and trotted leisurely away into the gathering gloom, and the boys, who had stopped all proceedings in the course of camp-making to watch him, hurried away for fuel and water.

A most grewsome reminder of the great herd was discovered one day at the bottom of a small canyon, perhaps forty feet across and thirty deep,—just such crevasses in the face of mother earth as are often met with in the more arid portions of the great plains.

At the bottom of this canyon they discovered bleaching in the hot sun the skull-

bones and partial skeletons of perhaps twenty buffalo. These grim reminders of the tragedy that had occurred at some not distant date at the bottom of the gulch were lying rather close together, just as the struggling mass must have fallen.

There were no signs of a piskun, although that may have been the cause of their death, or perhaps it was a wild stampede upon a dark night. Maybe the herd had been cowering in the darkness, standing in a rather compact bunch while a thunder-storm was in progress. Presently a peal of thunder more terrible than its predecessors, or a brighter flash of lightning, may have turned loose that madness known as the stampede in their midst. Or it may have been brought about by some quite ridiculous cause. Perhaps it was broad daylight, and the passing of a cloud shadow, or some unusual noise may have brought on the fatal tragedy.

Anyhow, it happened as the heap of bleaching bones at the bottom of the canyon testified, and away the herd went, galloping madly, heedless of all dangers,—just as liable to plunge into quagmires, or over precipices as anything else.

It was not until late September or early October that the Andersons saw the buffalo in any numbers. Hitherto, it had been an occasional lonely bison feeding in some coulee, or a solitary bull looking off across the country from the crest of a swell, but they now began to see them in larger numbers.

The jolting wagon by this time had pounded its weary way over the plains and through the Bad Lands and the desert-like portions of the prairies, where there was nothing but sage-brush and sprawling cactus, until they had reached a point near the northwest corner of Missouri,—what

would now be considered within an easy distance of Omaha and Topeka.

It was not an unfrequent sight to see upon the slope of a distant swell a dozen buffalo peacefully grazing, like domestic cattle. They usually made off at a slow trot whenever the wagon got within a few hundred yards of them. Not knowing much of the habits or disposition of the bison, Mr. Anderson said that they would not attempt to kill any at present even for meat, as deer and other game were plentiful.

So they journeyed along without molesting the bison that they saw, satisfied to let them alone, if they were in turn let alone.

This amicable arrangement might have held good until they reached their journey's end, in the heart of Kansas, had not something happened that made the killing of a few bison the price of safety to the little party. This was an event that no one of

the emigrants ever forgot as long as he lived, and an incident that filled one night as full of excitement and peril as it could well hold.

They had been traveling for two days over a nearly unbroken stretch of slightly undulating prairie. The summer sun had baked the earth till it was hard and lifeless. Every tuft of grass was burned to a crisp. Even the sage-brush that grew in all the sandy spots seemed parched by the shimmering heat. The sky was a bright intense blue, and each night the sunset was red and the afterglow partially obscured by a cloud of dust.

The watercourses and the cottonwoods were half a day's journey apart, and an intolerable thirst was over all the landscape.

The second day of this trying desert-like prairie stretch of their journey was just drawing to a close, when they noted upon

the northern horizon what at first seemed to be a cloud of smoke.

At the thought of a prairie fire upon such a parched area as these plains, a horrible fear seized upon the little party, and Mr. Anderson hurried to the top of the nearest swell to learn if their worst fears were true.

On mounting the eminence, he discovered that the cloud extended from the east to the west as far as the eye could reach. It certainly was not smoke, but each minute it grew in density and volume, like a menace, something dark and foreboding that would engulf them.

Presently as he watched, he thought he heard a low rumbling, like the first indistinct sounds of thunder, and putting his ear to the ground in Indian fashion, he could hear the rumbling quite plainly. It was like the approach of a mighty earthquake, only it traveled much slower; like the rumbling of the surf; like the

voice of the sea, or the hurricane, heard at a distance.

Again the anxious man scanned the dark, ominous-looking cloud, that now belted half the horizon, and this time he thought that he discerned dark particles like tiny dancing motes in the cloud. Then as he gazed, the specks grew larger, like gnats or small flies, close to where the horizon line should have been. Here and there were clouds of the dark specks, like swarms of busy insects. But what a myriad there was. In some places they fairly darkened the cloud.

Then in a flash the truth dawned upon the incredulous man leaving him gasping with astonishment, and quaking with fear.

All these tiny specks upon the horizon line were buffalo. A mighty host stretching from east to west as far as the eye could reach, and to the north God only knew how far. Like an avalanche that rushes

upon its way, unmindful of man and human life; pitiless as fate, and as remorseless as all the primeval forces of nature, the Thundering Herd was rolling down upon them.

For a few seconds he gazed, fascinated and held to the spot by his very fear, and the wonder of it all. Darker and darker grew the cloud. Plainer and plainer the headlong rush of the countless host was seen, while the rumbling of their ten thousand hoofs, which at first had been like distant thunder, now swelled to the volume of a rapidly approaching hurricane. The solid earth was felt to vibrate and rock, to tremble and quake.

Mr. Anderson waited to see no more, but fled back to his family whose escape from this sea of hoofs now seemed to him almost hopeless.

The boys hurried to meet him, their faces pale with fright, for even the rest of the

family now realized that some great danger was swooping down upon them.

Mr. Anderson made his plan of escape as he ran. To think of fleeing was out of the question. Their slow-moving schooner would be overtaken in almost no time. There was no canyon, no coulee in which to take refuge; no butte to which they might flee; not even a tree or a rock behind which they might crouch, and thus be partly shielded. Out in the open the danger must be met, with nothing but the shelter of the wagon to keep off the grinding hoofs, and only the muzzles of their three guns to stand between them and annihilation when the crash came.

Hastily they turned the wagon about, with its hind end toward the herd. The mules were unhitched from the pole and each hitched to the front wheel. A rope was also passed through the side strap of the harness of each mule, and he was fast-

ened to the hind wheel of the wagon, so that he could not swing about and be across the tide when this sea of buffalo should strike them. This kept the mules with their heels toward the herd, thus securing the additional aid of a mule's heels on guard at each side of the wagon. Old Brindle was secured to the pole of the wagon, where the mules had been. The wheels were blocked. What furniture the wagon contained was piled up behind to help make a barricade. When all had been made as snug as possible, the family crawled under the wagon and awaited results. The muzzles of the two rifles were held in readiness for an emergency at either side of the wagon, while Mrs. Anderson had the shotgun in readiness to reinforce the garrison should they need more loaded weapons at a moment's notice.

Nearer and nearer came the Thundering Herd, while the vibrations in the solid earth grew with each passing second. The clouds

of dust shut out the light of the setting sun, and made a dark pall over all the landscape, which was like the descending of the mantle of death.

Bennie gritted his teeth together and tried hard not to let the muzzle of his rifle shake as he pointed it out between the spokes of the hind wheel on his side of the wagon.

On come the terrible battalions of galloping hoofs, the massive heads and black beards of mighty bulls glowering through the clouds of dust. Each second the pounding of their hoofs swelled in volume, and each second the vibrations of the solid earth became more pronounced. Like the smoke of a great conflagration, the dust-clouds settled over the prairies until the crouching, trembling human beings, so impotent in this vast mad rush of wild beasts, could see the frontlets of the bulls but a few rods away.

THE MAD, GALLOPING, SURLY HERD WAS ALL ABOUT THEM

But almost before they had time to realize it, the mad, galloping, pushing, steaming, snorting herd was all about them, pounding by so close that the coats of the nearest bulls brushed the sides of the mules.

At first they seemed to turn out a bit for the wagon, but presently a bunch of buffalo, more compact than the rest of the herd, was seen bearing down upon them as though they were charging the schooner, although they probably did not even notice it.

"Ready with your rifle, Bennie," called Mr. Anderson, and father and son both cocked their guns. When the bunch was almost upon them, both fired, and a mighty bull fell kicking against the back of the wagon, but his kicks were not of long duration, for at this short range the rifles did fearful execution.

There was no respite, however, for close behind the fallen bull came more, and Mr.

Anderson reached for the shotgun, and piled another bull upon the first, although he had to finish him with a Colt's revolver, which was destined to stand them in much better stead than the guns.

It was with difficulty that the muzzle-loading rifles could be loaded while lying down in the cramped position under the wagon, but the Colt's revolver, which was a forty-four and just as effective at this short range as a rifle, could be readily reloaded, and Mrs. Anderson kept its five chambers full.

Old Abe, the mule upon the right side of the wagon, now took his turn in the fray, for a bull galloped too close to him, raking Abe's flank with his sharp horn. The mule let both heels fly, striking another bull fairly in the forehead, and felling him to the ground. But a buffalo's skull is as thick as a board, and the bull jumped up and galloped on with his fellows.

For a few minutes the two dead bulls at the rear of the wagon seemed to act as a buffer and the others parted just enough to graze the wagon. The mules, who brayed and kicked whenever the buffalo came too close, also helped, but presently another bunch was seen bearing down upon them. They were close together and crowding, and did not seem likely to give way for the crouching fugitives under the wagon.

Although Bennie and his father both fired, and Mr. Anderson followed up the rifle shots with both barrels from the shot-gun, and three shots from the Colt's, yet they struck the wagon with a terrific shock.

There was frantic kicking and frenzied braying from both Abe and Ulysses and a violent kicking and pounding in the wagon that seemed to be immediately over their heads.

It was plain that instantaneous action of some kind was necessary if their domicile

was to be saved, for one of the crowding bulls had been carried immediately into the wagon. He had become entangled in the top, and was pawing and kicking to free himself. His great head just protruded over the seat.

Mr. Anderson reached up quickly with the Colt's, and put an end to his kicking with two well directed shots.

There were now four dead bulls piled up behind the wagon and one inside of it, and soon the blood from their last victim came trickling through upon the helpless family. It was a grewsome position, but they could not escape it and all were so glad that the blood was not their own, that they did not mind.

"We are pretty well barricaded now, Bennie," shouted Mr. Anderson, just making himself heard above the thunder of galloping hoofs. "I think we are safe. They cannot get at us over all that beef and they

cannot get through the side, so I do not see but we are secure."

"Thank God," exclaimed Mrs. Anderson fervently, "but I shan't feel safe until the last buffalo has passed."

She had barely ceased speaking when old Abe uttered a piercing bray, in which was both terror and pain. He accompanied the outcry with a vicious kick, but almost immediately sank to the earth, kicking and pawing. It was then seen that a bull had ripped open the mule's left side, partially disemboweling him, a mortal wound. His frantic kicking so endangered the cowering fugitives under the wagon that Mr. Anderson was obliged to shoot him. His loss was irreparable, and the boys whimpered softly to themselves as they saw their old friend stretched out dead beside the wagon.

Old Brindle at this point became unmanageable, breaking her rope, so that the seething black mass swallowed her. "There

goes old Brindle too," sobbed Tommy. "I guess we will all starve now."

Poor Shep, who had been securely tied at the forward end of the wagon, cowered and whimpered as though he too thought the judgment day had come, and it was his and Tommy's lot to comfort each other,—the dog licking the boy's hands, and he in turn patting the dog's head.

The loss of old Brindle and Abe proved to be the turning-point in the misfortunes of the Andersons, for the herd now parted at the barricade made by the dead buffalo, the mule, and the wagon, so that although every few minutes it seemed as though they would be engulfed, yet the danger veered to one side and passed by.

Half an hour and then an hour went by and still there was no diminution of the herd. The second hour and the third passed and still they came, crowding and pushing, blowing and snorting, steaming and reeking.

"Won't they ever go by, father?" asked Bennie. "I should think there were a million of them."

"It is the most wonderful thing that I ever saw," replied Mr. Anderson. "I have often heard old hunters tell about the countless herds of buffalo, but I had always supposed that they were lying. In the future I will believe anything about their numbers."

At last seeing that they were in no immediate danger, Mr. Anderson told the boys to go to sleep if they could and he would watch. If there was any need of their help, he would call them.

Accordingly, all the firearms were loaded and placed by Mr. Anderson and the boys, and Shep curled up near the forward wheels to rest. They were terribly tired, for the excitement and the hard work had told upon their young nerves and muscles.

The last thing Bennie remembered was

the thunder of the myriad hoofs, and the rocking and trembling of the earth under him. But even these sounds soon ceased for him, and he and his brother slept.

When he again opened his eyes, the sun was shining brightly and the clouds of dust that had obscured the moon when he fell asleep had been partly dissipated. Here and there he could see an occasional buffalo galloping southward, but the mighty herd, whose numbers had seemed like the stars, was gone.

"It's the tail end of the procession, boy," called Bennie's father. "The last installment went by about fifteen minutes ago. I did not dream that bison could be found in such numbers in Western Missouri at the present time. I had supposed the few scattering head that we saw were all that were left in the state."

This conclusion of Mr. Anderson's was quite right, but this autumn, for some un-

accountable reason, the great herd had come down for a part of the way on the Missouri River on its southern migration following the old trail of two decades before, instead of crossing Western Nebraska and Kansas. It had been a costly experiment, however, for all the way hunters had swarmed upon their flanks and they had lost thousands of head, but their number was legion, so what did it matter?[1]

[1] At the time of which I am writing the bison had disappeared in all parts of Missouri, with the exception of the Bad Lands, where they were still found in small bands. So persistently did they stick to this wild country that Colonel Roosevelt tells of shooting individual buffalo in Missouri as late as 1885.

CHAPTER III

LITTLE BIGHEAD

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Slowly and thankfully the Andersons crawled out from under the wagon and stretched themselves and rubbed their joints. Their muscles had become so cramped and stiff that it was some time before the elder members of the party could stand, but the boys seemed to experience very little ill effect from the night's sleep on the ground under the wagon.

The most delighted member of the party was Shep, who danced about, barking and frolicking as soon as he was untied.

But what a scene it was that met their eyes! The ground had seemed dry and parched enough before, but it had shown still a little semblance of verdure. Now

all that had been ground to dust by the passing herd. Not only had all vegetation been destroyed, but the solid earth, which had seemed so hard from the baking of the sun, was dented and harrowed by the myriad hoofs. Steaming dung was everywhere, and the reek of cattle, hot and steamy, filled the air. This taint was so strong that it still seemed as though they must be all about, and the boys kept looking apprehensively to the north, for the air was still filled with the presence of the herd.

Mr. Anderson at once untied old Ulysses, who evidenced his delight by kicking up and braying after the most approved manner of mules. Grass there was none to be had, so after nosing about for a while the mule philosophically went to eating a young cottonwood. The mule is the most hardy of the equestrian family, and he will thrive where a horse will die. Sawdust or almost anything else seems to be grist for his mill

"We must hurry up and get breakfast and then go in search of old Brindle," said Mr. Anderson. "It seems like rather a hopeless task on these great plains, but we have got to find her."

So while the boys went to a distant dead cottonwood for fuel, Mr. Anderson cut the tongues from the four dead animals, which were quite enough for their breakfast.

His method of severing the tongue was unique,—something that he had learned of an old frontiersman. With his hunting-knife he cut the tongue off under the jaw at its roots, and then drew it out through the side of the mouth, without the tedious process of prying open the dead animal's jaws, which might have been somewhat of an undertaking.

Breakfast put heart into the emigrants and made life look better worth living.

Mr. Anderson's first move after the meal was to draw the wagon away from the three

dead buffalo, and then to snake out the one inside, by the aid of Ulysses. This was quite a task and he nearly tipped the wagon over in doing it, but it was finally accomplished.

They then left Mrs. Anderson and her youngest son to do what they could to repair the damage in camp, while Mr. Anderson and Bennie went in search of old Brindle.

It seemed almost a hopeless task upon the hoof-beaten plain to find her, even if she had not been swept along with the herd. But Mr. Anderson counted upon Shep. He had gone for the cow in the Indiana pasture ever since he was a curly frisking pup, and if any nose could follow her trail it was his. Besides he was a famous cattle dog, having participated many times, back in the Hoosier State, in rounding up strayed or stolen cattle.

Not only was old Brindle a necessity to

the family as a producer of milk, but she was now to be their other mule, for it was only by hitching her beside Ulysses that they could continue their journey.

It was now merely a question of traveling until they could find a fertile coulee, or a hundred acres of bottom-land, which should be sheltered, and near to wood and water, when they would stop and get to work making things snug for the winter.

To the surprise of every one, Shep took the track of old Brindle after being told to fetch the cow, and started off across the desolate plains, Mr. Anderson and Bennie following at his heels. He was obliged to go rather slowly, however, and keep his nose close to the ground. It seemed almost like a miracle that he could follow it at all among the myriad hoof prints.

The trail led, as they had expected, to the southward, the old cow evidently being swept along with the herd. All the time

the man and boy kept a sharp lookout for a creek, as they were nearly famished, the contents of one water-jug having lasted the whole family all through that perilous night.

On, on they went across the endless plains, the scorching sun beating down mercilessly. At about noon they were obliged to rest in a small canyon, which was the only shade that they had met with since leaving camp. Even here there was little verdure, and almost no trees, and worst of all no water.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon they again took up their tedious quest. Shep was now often rather uncertain of the trail, and was occasionally obliged to take fifteen minutes to unravel it from that of the rest of the herd.

Finally at about four o'clock the broad trail struck off to the west, and all felt instinctively that this change would better

their fortunes. Nor was this feeling a false hope, for soon cottonwoods and green bluffs loomed up ahead, and in another hour they were again upon the banks of the broad Missouri, which they had not seen for two weeks.

With a shout of delight, man, boy, and dog plunged into the shallow water, and were soon refreshed, drinking and drinking until it seemed as though they would burst.

"I must start back at once for camp, to carry water to mother and Tom," said Mr. Anderson. "You can continue the search for old Brindle, and we will meet here at this particular spot upon the river bank. That is, if we can get the wagon here. If I cannot, I will come forward on foot, so that you can look for me here to-morrow night without fail."

At the thought of being left alone upon the wide desolate plains, with no other company than Shep, Bennie's heart failed

him. He was made of good stuff, however, and did not let his father see that he was afraid. The need of his mother and brother, who had gone all day with little water, must be terrible. For their sakes he must be a man.

"All right, father," he said, choking down his fears. "To-morrow night we will meet here. I will have old Brindle, and you be here with the wagon and mother and Tom."

Father and son clasped hands to cement the bargain, and after filling both canteens, for Bennie was to be left without one, Mr. Anderson started back for camp, going by means of the small compass that he always carried. Besides this he also had a compass somewhere inside him. A woodsman's compass,—an instinct that almost never fails its owner and is priceless upon the frontier. Besides if it was not cloudy, there was always the bright, intense North Star,

just in line with the bowl of the Big Dipper, to guide one.

In spite of his strong resolutions to be a man, it was with a terrible sense of loneliness that Bennie watched his father's form grow smaller and smaller as he hurried back to the waiting ones in camp. As soon as the figure disappeared over the top of a distant rise in the prairies, the boy and the dog set about exploring the immediate country and also looking for a suitable place to spend the night.

As the river was broad and quite swift here, Bennie thought there might be a very good chance of finding the cow upon the morrow. The herd had swum the river, and its straggling rear-guard could be plainly seen feeding upon some high plateau-like prairie beyond. Bennie felt positive that old Brindle would not swim the river, for she was not used to such long swims as were these wild cattle.

So the boy and the dog explored the banks for a mile in each direction without seeing any signs of the cow, and then they decided to stop in a small coulee leading down to the river. Here it was cool and sweet and very restful after the long tramp across the plains.

Bennie did not share his bison-steak with the dog, so he shot a gopher for Shep, who seemed quite contented with his own supper.

Presently the soft mantle of dusk dropped suddenly over the great plains, and one by one the stars appeared. Bennie amused himself counting them until they came so fast that he could no longer keep track of them; then he went to collect some fagots for the night camp-fire.

The plains seemed so vast and lifeless as far as human life was concerned. It would not seem quite so bad when they had the fire going, for a camp-fire is a great dis-

penser of cheer in a lonely corner of the world. Its cracking and sputtering is almost like the voice of a friend.

Now the coyote began his mournful night-song, and a loon from far up the river joined in to keep the small wolves company. Some mallards were quacking softly to themselves in the sedges along the bank, and great bayou bullfrogs were sounding their deep bass notes.

The most sinister sound that came to their ears was the far-away hunting-cry of the great gray wolf,—some grizzled old leader calling to his pack as they skirted the rear-guard of the herd of buffalo. Perhaps it was a sick old bull, whom they had cut out of the herd, or maybe it was a heifer and her first calf. In either case it boded no good for the quarry that the gray wolf hunted that night.

At the sound every hair upon Shep's back went up and he trembled with excitement

and fear. But soon they had the camp-fire blazing brightly and Bennie knew that as long as they kept it going, the wolves would not come very close to them.

When Shep had finished his gopher, and the boy his buffalo meat, both took a drink from the river, and then they cuddled down by the camp-fire for the night.

Bennie pillowed his head upon the soft coat of Shep and held one hand in his collar. The other grasped the stock of his rifle. Thus doubly guarded, the boy fell asleep.

The next thing that Bennie remembered was a sensation that something was licking his face. His first confused thought was that it might be a bear. Had a huge bear crept upon him while he slept and was he now in the act of washing his dirty face, preparatory to eating him?

Instinctively his hand tightened upon the grip of the rifle, and he slowly opened his eyes, only to look into the grinning face

of Shep—faithful Shep, who had watched all night at his side and was now gently licking his face to awaken him.

The sun was just mounting over the eastern rim of the prairie, and a score of unknown birds were twittering and scolding in the small cottonwoods by the river. The ducks were quacking and gabbling as they fed in the sedges along shore. The whole vast stretch of mother earth was waking into the fulness of another day.

Bennie sat up and rubbed his eyes and tried to remember where he was. Then it all came over him in a flash. He and Shep were alone by the great river and his father and mother and Tommy were somewhere to the north. He was to look up old Brindle and bring her to the river bank, and his father was to bring the schooner and the rest of the family to their place of rendezvous.

Bennie made a hasty breakfast on some

of the buffalo meat which still remained, and shot another gopher for Shep. Finally both took a drink in the Missouri, and then boy and dog started off up the river to look for the missing cow.

They had not gone two miles when they came to a broad, deep coulee, filled with small trees, and through it flowed a bright little stream to meet the Missouri. Although it was hot and dry out on the prairie, at the bottom of the coulee it was cool and sweet. It seemed such a restful spot that Bennie and Shep lay down in the grateful shade to rest for a little before pursuing their quest further.

They had been lying still for perhaps fifteen minutes when Shep reared upon his haunches and began sniffing the air excitedly. His young master told him to lie down and keep quiet, but he paid no attention to the command.

"What's the matter with you, Shep?"

asked the boy finally, seeing the dog's growing excitement. For answer Shep bolted through the cover, uttering quick, excited barks at every jump. Thinking that he had discovered some game which was close at hand, Bennie rushed after him, rifle in readiness to shoot at a moment's notice.

After going about ten rods, Shep's barking suddenly ceased and his young master came abruptly upon him in a little open spot, where he stood exultantly wagging his tail and grinning at a large reddish object which was partly hidden under a small spreading cottonwood.

Was it a buffalo? Bennie raised the rifle, but it suddenly fell in his hands. It was old Brindle, standing under the tree swishing flies and chewing her cud.

But this surprise was barely over when they were treated to another, for the old cow, who had usually been upon the best of terms with Shep, charged full upon the

faithful dog, causing him to turn tail and skulk away through the coulee.

But every few rods Shep would turn about and wag his tail, as much as to say, "Now what does this mean, Brindle? You know me. I am Shep, your old friend."

Bennie was still standing gazing after them and wondering what made the cow act so strangely, when the dog doubled back and came under the tree where the cow had been standing. He was too good a cattle dog not to understand something of the cow's actions. At this move upon Shep's part Brindle became more enraged than ever, charging him furiously. Shep repeated his tactics again, leading the cow a few rods away and then doubled sharply coming back under the tree again.

This time he seemed to find what he was looking for, and he told the news to his master with excited barks, now refusing to be driven away from the tree, but skulk-

ing in and out and just eluding the cow's horns.

At last it dawned upon Bennie that there was something under the tree which was the cause of this strange game of hide and seek between the dog and the cow. So he slowly advanced, calling soothingly to Brindle.

He had taken not a dozen steps when he almost stumbled over the strangest looking little yellow calf that he had ever seen. It was lying curled up in a comfortable nest made in the brakes, its two great ears slowly wagging away the flies.

It was a very decided yellow with a short, thick coat. Its eyes were very large and wondering, and it had a spike-tail only a few inches in length. But the most peculiar thing of all about the calf was that its head was very large, and it looked almost as though it might topple over if it got to its feet.

"By jiminy," cried Bennie, "old Brindle has gone and had a calf!"

But no, this could not be; the cow had been new milch only for a few months. The calf was not hers, but she had plainly adopted it.

At that moment from far across the river floated the bellow of a distant buffalo. This sound gave just the key to the mystery needed, and the truth flashed across Bennie. It was a buffalo calf, one that had lost its mother and strayed away from the herd. Old Brindle had either adopted it of her own will, or perhaps the little stranger had forced his company upon her.

Bennie now went up to old Brindle and got hold of her horns. Then he untied a rope which he had carried about his waist for the purpose and secured the cow, and with Shep bringing up the rear, started to lead her slowly out of the coulee.

At the first move upon their part the calf

scrambled to his feet with great alacrity and trotted after them, keeping his big head butting away at old Brindle's flanks. This seemed to please the cow, for she looked back and looed at the calf. Thus the procession made their way back to the place that had been appointed for the meeting of the family in the evening.

Bennie busied himself getting fire-wood and searching out the best place for camp when the wagon and the rest of the family should arrive.

About three o'clock he made out the schooner, perhaps two miles away, coming slowly toward them. Tying old Brindle securely, he went to help his father with the wagon, leaving Shep in charge of the cow and the calf.

He found them having a hard time of it, dragging the wagon by means of one mule, and what assistance Mr. Anderson could give him.

Bennie at once told the good news of their finding the cow, but said nothing of his other find. This would be his and Shep's surprise for them. At last the wagon lumbered down to the bank of the river where Shep was keeping guard over his two charges.

Just as they came up, the cow, which had been lying down, arose, and the comical little yellow calf, all head and with almost no tail, jumped to his feet and butted playfully at Shep.

The moment that Tommy saw him he cried, "Oh, you dear little Bighead." The name fitted him so well that it was the only one he had until he was two years old.

The following day the harness that had been used upon the dead mule was readjusted to the shape of old Brindle, and she was hitched beside Ulysses. Soon the schooner resumed its weary way over the prairies, but at a rather slower pace than

before. Mr. Anderson had to walk by Brindle's side, and lead her, as she refused to be driven.

They now forded the Missouri River, and for four weeks journeyed westward into the state of Kansas where the gently undulating prairies, traversed by many creeks and rivers, greatly pleased Mr. Anderson.

One evening just at sunset they came upon a small stream flowing down from the north. This river was perhaps one hundred feet across, and along its banks stretched a beautiful meadow about a mile wide.

This meadow-land was not undulating like the prairie, but was made land which the wash of the river had smoothed and enriched. The beaver also had done his part in producing the meadows, as the remains of some old beaver dams testified.

Mr. Anderson's eye was at once taken with the spot. He saw at a glance that the

meadows were rich and especially fine grass land. Although it was nearly the first of October, the meadow grass was still quite green and higher than the knees.

"Here is our stopping-place for the present," he said, as the schooner came out on the bank of the stream. "I know that it is good water by the looks of it. This is fine land. It is sheltered, and altogether an ideal spot for our home."

So a suitable camping-place was selected and the cow and the mule were turned loose upon the meadow.

The following morning they began in earnest to make ready for the winter. They had brought a few necessary tools with them, such as carpenters' tools, a plough, shovels, hoes, rakes, and nearly all the small farm-tools.

There were two things to consider and these were to provide food and shelter for the winter. In the frontier the stock is

usually provided for, even before the human beings, so their first care was to cut and stack several tons of the meadow hay. This occupied nearly two weeks. Then they turned their attention to making winter-quarters.

On one side of the stream, about half a mile back from the Kansas River into which their creek emptied, was a woody bluff. This would afford shelter from the winds and also a fuel supply. Accordingly, this spot was selected as the site of their abode. Nature had also favored them here, for they discovered a natural cave in the bluff, which a few days' work made a very comfortable stable for the cow and mule, not to mention Little Bighead, who was now the center of all the plans as far as the young people were concerned. Mrs. Anderson also was as fond of him as she had ever been of any pet calf back on the Indiana farm.

Having provided for the stock, Mr. Anderson turned his attention to making suitable quarters for his family during the winter months.

They first dug quite a respectable cellar in the side hill and then builded a log and sod lean-to, part of it underground and part above. This made the cabin warmer than it would have been had all four walls been exposed to the wind and cold, and it was also lighter than an entire dugout would have been. All the cracks and chinks were plastered up tight with mud and clay, and at last it was quite snug. A fine stone chimney was also builded from the underground part of the cabin, and this added greatly to its comfort.

Having done the most necessary things, Mr. Anderson and Bennie now set themselves the task of providing meat for the winter. This was also work, but rather more exciting than the house building.

They soon discovered that bear and deer were quite plentiful in the bottom-lands along the river, four or five miles farther up-stream. Where there are deer, you can usually find Bruin, for the bear is fond of venison. A week's hunt gave them five fine bearskins, and all the bear meat that they would care for all winter. These bearskins were a very important part of the furnishing of the cabin, as they added greatly to the warmth and comfort of their abode both by day and night. Venison was also obtained in abundance, and both this, and the bear meat was cut in very thin strips and dried until it was almost as hard as a chip. But when moistened it was again very palatable.

Later on they could also shoot different kinds of game and hang it up outside, letting it freeze. In this way it would keep all winter and could be thawed out whenever necessary. Fish were also added to

the menu each day. These could be caught whenever they were wanted, and the boys thought it great sport so to furnish the larder.

But for the moment I had almost lost sight of Little Bighead, who is from now on the central figure in this story. During the two weeks' march to their final stopping-place, he had been much in evidence. He usually trotted soberly along by the side of old Brindle, but he very frequently frisked and capered off a few rods on his own account. He and Shep were the best of friends from the first. The calf would make believe to butt the dog, at which Shep would growl and show his teeth, and then they would race in and out along the trail in the liveliest manner.

Sometimes Shep would stand perfectly still for five minutes and let the buffalo calf suck his ear. This was a favorite pastime of Little Bighead's. Then Shep would

suddenly jerk his ear away and seize the calf's leg in his mouth. Sometimes he even tumbled him over, but this was merely in play and the dog and calf were inseparable. They slept together, and were always wandering about the meadows together. Shep seemed to think that it devolved upon him to look out for the calf.

Finally the snow came and there was little that they could do except stay inside and keep warm. But on pleasant days Bennie and Mr. Anderson went upon long hunting trips. On one of these trips they shot a couple of antelope, something that they had not been able to do before.

In the spring they broke land and planted corn and potatoes, and also sowed a little wheat. They likewise had a little patch of a garden which the boys tended. There was always plenty for all to do, and they did their work with a will. Work made

them brown and strong, with appetites like wolves.

Little Bighead grew like a weed, and it was soon apparent that he was to be a mighty buffalo. By the time he was two years old he weighed about eight hundred pounds and took his place in the harness, with either the cow or the mule.

His back was broad and flat, and Bennie taught Shep to jump upon him and ride him down to the stream that he might drink. This the buffalo did not seem to mind at all,—in fact he rather liked it. It was a laughable and interesting sight to see the dog standing erect and alert as a drum-major, driving the buffalo at a gallop to the river for a drink.

No matter how large Little Bighead grew, he did not outgrow his friendship for Shep. Even when the dog would snap at his heels just in fun, he always seemed to understand that it was in play and that Shep was still

his good friend. Thus this strange friendship grew, while the fame of the dog who could ride a buffalo at a gallop went far up and down the state of Kansas.

Two more incidents from the rather uneventful life of Little Bighead will serve to show why he and Shep were such good friends, and how the faithful dog constituted himself the buffalo calf's particular protector.

The first of these happened the spring after the Andersons settled down upon their new homestead. It was late in May or early in June and the ploughing and other spring work had been done for weeks. Spring comes early upon these wind-swept prairies, where there is little snow. This particular day was a "scorcher" even upon the prairies, where the hot winds sweep over the broad spaces with their withering breath. One could fairly see the heat shimmer and dance, while the light looked in-

tense and everything seemed much nearer than usual.

Shep was lying upon the ground in front of the cabin fast asleep, his nose upon his paws, which were crossed. Suddenly he jumped up, uttering a sharp, short bark, although there had been apparently nothing to disturb him. Bennie, who was lying upon the grass near by, called to him, thinking he had been dreaming.

Shep winked and blinked, and for a moment looked wonderingly about, and then without more ado started for the creek, running like the wind. Bennie looked after him in astonishment, but knowing well the dog's keen perception and watchfulness with everything about the place, started after him, thinking that something out of the ordinary was afoot.

When Shep reached the river, upon a sand-bank near a shelving ledge of slate and shale he found his friend Little Big-

head stamping and snorting at something upon the sand near by.

The dog was still thirty or forty feet away when a huge rattlesnake reared its head almost to the calf's nose and drew back to strike. Without a second's hesitation, although he well knew the danger, Shep sprang between them and with a lucky snap caught the snake by the neck just behind the head. Some instinct told him that his only safety lay in holding on, so he sank his teeth deep in the rattler's neck, and held on like the proverbial puppy to a root.

For a few seconds there was a lively time upon the sand-spit. The snake writhed and thrashed horribly, winding his body and tail about the dog's neck and nearly shutting off his breath, but by degrees the rattler ceased his struggles, until at last he lay perfectly limp in the dog's jaws. Then Shep laid him down upon the sand and

stood over him, watchful lest the snake be playing him some trick. In this attitude Bennie found them, the dog growling and watching the snake, and the calf stamping and snorting and looking as though he did not know what to make of it.

When Shep had been petted and told again and again that he was the best dog in the world, Bennie carried the snake up to the cabin, and Shep drove Little Bighead back home at a lively pace, snapping at his heels and barking at every jump. This was clearly the dog's way of punishing the foolish calf for his folly in disturbing the snake.

The reptile proved to be four feet in length and possessed of about a dozen rattles. My readers will at once conclude that the snake was a dozen years old, but that is an error. It is a mistake to count a year for each rattle. Mr. Horniday has at the Bronx rattlesnakes three years old which

have seven rattles. Sometimes a snake will develop two rattles a year, and occasionally not any. It all depends upon how many times he sheds his skin. The rattle is a hard bit of skin at the tip of the tail which does not come off in the process of shedding.

The second time that Shep came to the rescue of the calf was the same year, but in late November, when the calf was a year and a half old. It was a cold bleak day of scudding wind-clouds and stinging winds that swept the unbroken plains with great force. The ducks had all gone south nearly a month before. The gopher and the prairie dogs had denned up. The musquash had builded his house by the stream and everything was in readiness for winter.

Little Bighead had wandered half a mile up the creek near which the Andersons were located, looking for choice bits of late grass which the frost had overlooked. Shep was busy on the side hill a quarter of

a mile below trying to dig out a gopher, when he noticed the young buffalo coming down-stream and running frantically.

His loose-jointed legs were working desperately, and his little spike tail stuck straight up with fright. Almost at the same instant that Shep saw his friend making the run of his life, he discovered that he was closely followed by a great gray wolf, who was gaining upon him steadily.

Only the very largest and fiercest dogs are any match for a gray wolf, and even then they usually come off badly in any encounter with the terrible gray fighters. Shep was not a large dog, although he was a fair-sized cattle dog, but Little Bighead was his friend.

He had watched over him and protected him ever since he was a wobbly-kneed calf, and he did not hesitate now. Every hair upon his back went fighting mad and he started up the creek to meet his friend.

As the yearling was running frantically down the creek and Shep was going up, it did not take long to cover the intervening distance. In almost less time than it takes to tell, the buffalo raced by a clump of bushes where the faithful dog had crouched for his spring upon the wolf.

The gray hunter was so intent upon his quarry that the first intimation he had of the dog was when Shep sprang full in his face and gripped him by the loose skin at the side of the throat.

The dog had tried for the throat grip, but had gotten a mouthful of loose skin instead. Shep held on for dear life, for he well knew that if once the wolf got free, he would soon make things interesting for him, while the wolf struggled frantically. Over and over they went in the brush, the wolf's jaws working like a mighty steel-trap, but they only clicked upon air.

As good luck would have it, Bennie had

just started up the creek to look at some beaver-traps which he had set that fall, and met Little Bighead running frantically for the stable. The yearling, he knew, would not be running like that without cause, so Bennie hurried in the opposite direction. He came upon Shep and the struggling wolf in the nick of time, for the wolf had just freed himself and was in the act of springing upon the dog, who stood at bay and ready to fight to the death, although he would have been overpowered and killed in a few minutes.

Bennie raised his rifle for a snap-shot, and sent a bullet whistling over the wolf's head. He did not dare fire low and directly at him for fear of hitting the dog. The gray wolf turned with a snarl, but seeing the boy with the rifle and smelling gunpowder, he disappeared in the bushes with a single bound, leaving Shep and Bennie in full possession of the field.

So was it any wonder after adventures like these that Shep grew to consider himself the particular guardian of the foolish buffalo, who did not know enough to take care of himself, or that the young bison came to look upon Shep as his friend and preserver,—his good angel who would always appear in the hour of peril?

CHAPTER IV

A STRANGE RIDE

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THE two years that had passed, during which time Little Bighead had grown from a fuzzy yellow buffalo calf into a sturdy young bull of eight or nine hundred weight, had seen wonders wrought upon the land which the Andersons called their homestead. Like all frontier people they had come West for business. Success was not to be had merely for the taking. It had to be wrung from the earth here as anywhere else.

But here the natural conditions were of the best. All that nature could do for the fertile acres of their meadows she had done. For hundreds of years the silt from the river had been piling up on these meadows, until now the plough turned up a rich black

loam, that did not give way to clay, even two or three feet down.

But some one had to hold the plough, and sow the seed and reap the harvest. All these things the Anderson family were willing to do. So when the first red glow came into the east and the prairie lark mounted skyward, they had already turned their first furrow; and long after the moon swung her silver censer out of the east and the countless stars appeared, they went up and down the endless furrows.

When Little Bighead was two years old, he took his place beside Ulysses and helped draw the plough. At first he could not keep up his end for more than an hour or two, as he was young and soft, but by degrees he toughened and his muscles strengthened, until when he was three or four years old, he became as strong and faithful as any ox.

It was for his young master Bennie,

though, that he best loved to work. Bennie had broken him to harness and also taught him to drive under the whip like an ox. Bennie could summon him from any part of the farm as far as he could hear his master's prolonged call, at the sound of which the young buffalo would come trotting or galloping from the more distant portions of their homestead. He knew well that Bennie would reward his faithfulness with a turnip, or, if he could not do any better, that he would pull him a tender wisp of grass.

But as the buffalo grew strong of limb and broad of back, the name Little Bighead, which had described him to a nicety the morning Bennie had found him upon the north bank of the Missouri, hidden by old Brindle under a cottonwood, became a sad misfit. His head was no longer so badly out of proportion to the rest of his body. So finally Bennie rechristened him, and he

received the rather homely but substantial name of Buck, a name well fitted to the sturdy ox that he had become.

Not only did the Andersons improve their land, but they also finally builded a very respectable log cabin. This was after the quarters for the animals had been enlarged and improved. In fact, the live stock finally went into the dugout that the family had themselves first used. It is always the way of frontier people to first provide for the stock and then for the humans.

The third year of their sojourn in this new fertile land a Swedish family settled three miles down the river, and the Andersons had neighbors. Before, their nearest neighbors had been eight miles away, still farther down the Kansas.

Also when Buck was three years old Bennie made a sledge or sled to which he hitched the buffalo whenever he wanted

to go on a journey. This sled was a rude home-made affair, although it did good service. It was made by cutting two ash poles twelve or fifteen feet long, and perhaps three inches in diameter at the butt. These poles were peeled and then the larger end was heated very hot by holding it for a time in a bed of live coals, but not long enough to set it on fire. This made the poles pliable, so that they could be bent without breaking. One end was then curved nicely to make a runner, and the shaping of the rest of the sled was easy.

After the snow had come, this vehicle was used to haul light loads of wood, or almost anything that they wished to haul. Even upon bare ground it would slip over the thick buffalo grass quite easily.

When the first snow had come, on very cold days the prairie chickens, which were plentiful, would dive under the snow to keep warm. Then it was that Bennie and his

father would drive about with this rude sled, using Buck as a horse, hunting the chickens. As the sled went crunching through the snow, it would scare up the game, which would fly a dozen rods or so, and then plump down in the snow. They would mark the spot, and then Bennie would creep up carefully and shoot the chicken with his rifle. In this way seventy-five or a hundred birds could be secured in a day.

When they got them home they simply ripped the skin off the breast and cut out that large fine chunk of meat, throwing away the rest of the bird. These chicken breasts were salted down, and it was not an uncommon thing for the Andersons to have half a barrel of this meat on hand at a time. This seems like a great waste to us, but the country was new and swarmed with game and fish, so the settlers merely took what they could get the easiest, and if they were ex-

travagant, nature was prodigal, and always supplied them more than they could use.

The same fall Bennie and Buck went upon a journey of fifty miles to the small frontier town of Pine Bluffs, where there was to be a merrymaking, according to the ideas of a rough frontier people. Husking was done, and the hard-working plains-folk were in for a good time. There was to be a turkey-shoot, some horse-races, and a wolf-hunt at the end.

It was Bennie's wish to exhibit his buffalo, and particularly to have the people see Shep ride, for the fame of this bareback rider had traveled far.

They were two or three days making the trip, but finally reached their destination, where they were cordially received according to the frontier way, which is to give the stranger the best in the house.

In the turkey-shoot Bennie easily distinguished himself, although he did not get

first prize, which went to a grizzled old Kentuckian; but Bennie was glad enough to rank second among these sure shots.

It was no wonder that he could shoot, for his little rifle had scarcely been out of his hands for the past six years. Away back in Indiana, when he was a slip of a boy, he had learned to plug squirrels through the head, and this made the large game of the plains an easy mark.

Bennie entered Buck in the races, which were running races between the scrub ponies and broncos. In the short distance Buck could not start quickly enough to win, but in a five-mile race across rough country he easily came in ahead, to the great delight of the crowd, which roared itself hoarse as the ponderous buffalo came pounding in at the home-stretch.

But greatest of all was the interest in the dog rider. Shep was such a good-natured dog that he had won the hearts of all, even

before they saw him ride, but after that astonishing event, which was the nearest approach to a circus that the frontier could boast, he was fairly spoiled with petting and admiration. He punctuated all his riding with a sharp, imperative voice, that urged the buffalo to his fastest pace, but he also did many things similar to those done by circus-dogs which have been trained to ride for exhibition.

He would ride standing perfectly erect, and straight as a drum-major. Then he would ride lying down, as though he were an Indian trying to escape arrows or bullets. Then he would turn about and ride with his head toward the buffalo's tail, and all the time his face was covered with a doggish grin that plainly said, "Don't you see how well I can do it?"

But the most wonderful thing of all that our circus-dog did was to mount while the buffalo was in motion. First, Bennie would

hold Shep, who was all eagerness, trembling and panting to do his trick, while Buck trotted slowly by. At just the right moment Bennie would let go the dog's collar, and Shep would spring lightly to the buffalo's back.

Then Buck would be called back, and sent by at a sharp trot when the dog would mount as before. But when Shep bounded lightly to his uncertain seat and gained his balance, while the buffalo was going at a pounding gallop, the settlers fairly yelled themselves hoarse.

All good times, however, come to a close, and so this one did, for finally the fun was over, and Bennie hitched Buck into the sled and they started home, feeling well repaid for their trouble, although the outing going and coming, and two days at the Bluffs, had consumed nearly a week.

When Buck was four years old, and Bennie was a stalwart, self-reliant boy of fifteen,

he decided to take a long journey going northward for several hundred miles, up into the very heart of the buffalo country. The mighty herds that he had seen four years before, while crossing the prairies of Missouri in the schooner, were now no longer seen in such numbers, although the slaughter of the northern herd had not yet begun. But as though in premonition of the coming disaster, they withdrew of their own accord.

The mighty herd that had thundered past on that eventful night, when the emigrants lay trembling with fright under the schooner, had gripped the boy's imagination. He longed to see its counterpart again; to feel once more the solid prairie shake as though with the passing of an earthquake and to see the shaggy frontlets of buffalo bulls as countless as the stars.

His mother was very loath to let him go. The Indians all along the frontier were of

uncertain temper. While most of them pretended friendliness for the time being, yet they would often take pot-shots at the frontiersman from behind friendly trees.

But Bennie had been brought up in an atmosphere of danger. His life was inured to hardship, and a love of adventure tingled in his veins. He wanted to see the world, just as the normal country boy wants to see the city. The only world that was at hand for him to explore was the wilderness to the northwest.

For a long time his father was in doubt as to whether he would let him go. He felt himself that there was some danger in the trip, but when he saw how restive his son was, and how he longed to be off, he finally gave his consent.

It was a memorable day in the life of the Anderson family when Bennie, mounted upon Buck, carrying his small rifle and the Colt's revolver, and with a rude tent and

camp-supplies lashed behind him, started forth on his trip.

His mother kissed him through blinding tears, for she felt as though she would never see him again, while Tommy was all tears because he could not go too. Mr. Anderson gripped the boy's hand with a clasp that he recalled for many days, and bade him, as he loved his parents, to take good care of himself and not run any useless risks.

It was a crisp morning in late September and the outlines of the distant bluffs along the river were wrapped in a blue haze almost like smoke. A few flight birds had already begun their long journey southward, and there was evidence that others would soon follow, for small flocks could be heard chattering among the wild plums and in the brambles. The young prairie-chickens were nearly grown and very plentiful. Game that would have delighted the palate of an epicure could be had

merely for the price of powder and ball. The air was like new wine, causing the blood to tingle and the heart to throb with joy, and the body to exult in its strength.

Bennie thought that the world had never looked so fair, or life seem so sweet as on this morning. It was the only vacation that he had taken since they came West, with the possible exception of the trip to the Bluffs, where he had given the exhibition of Shep's riding. Poor old Shep, how he had teased to come along. The last sight of home and the home friends that the boy remembered was the friendly face of Shep gazing over the distant hilltop after his young master.

For the better part of the way they went at a slow trot, which might perhaps cover three miles an hour. This gait was varied by occasionally stopping to walk, or sometimes Bennie put Buck to his cumbersome gallop, which, considering the size of the

buffalo, was a surprisingly fast pace. This gait did not seem to tire Buck and it gave a little added excitement and varied the monotony.

Each evening they camped, preferably near to water, and the boy turned his buffalo steed out to grass.

It was while in camp at night that he most missed the home friends, and Shep. On some of those lonely nights when the coyotes were howling and he seemed utterly alone in the vast endless prairies, what would he not have given to pillow his head upon the warm coat of Shep, and feel his confiding, snuggling muzzle in his hand.

Two weeks of this leisurely traveling brought him to the La Platte, a broad, shallow river which he forded, and then once more pushed on to the northwest, following in a general way the course of the buffalo trails.

It was not many days before the buffalo

signs began to multiply. The northern herd had not yet felt the inroads of the robe-hunters, although in the four years since the Andersons had come West, the southern herd, numbering hundreds of millions of head, had nearly disappeared.

Man was not alarmingly destructive to the buffalo beyond the distance at which he could readily pack his hides into market, so buffalo were still found in great numbers a hundred miles north of the Union Pacific road. Gradually, however, as the steamboats plying upon the Missouri River, to accommodate the settlements that sprang up like mushrooms in a single night upon its banks, grew more numerous, the herds were forced farther north and northwest, until they finally took refuge in the Dakotas and Montana.

Two weeks of traveling, in the manner already described, carried our young explorer well into the territory of Dakota,

and he now began to see buffalo in such numbers that he was again reminded of the great herd they had seen in Northern Missouri four years before.

Every slope upon the prairie was dotted with them,—buffalo feeding and lying down, bulls and cows, calves and yearlings; rusty old bulls with their coat, much of which was still unshed, hanging in tatters, and sleek young bulls shining like satin; nervous young heifers with their first calves, and demure old cows that had mothered many a sturdy calf.

Not only was the landscape literally covered with bison, but their signs were everywhere: buffalo trails leading to the creeks cut three feet deep in the solid earth; cottonwoods and sycamores entirely stripped of their bark in the rubbing process, the turf, in good feeding places, literally covered with buffalo chips. This in turn enriched the grass and made the next

year's feeding all the better, so the buffalo gave where he took, and the earth was not denuded for long.

For the greater part, the bison seemed peaceable enough among themselves although there was occasionally a fight to the death among the bulls, where some king of the herd was being dethroned.

While Bennie stayed upon the back of Buck, he attracted no attention, but as soon as he dismounted, he was an object of suspicion and disfavor. He soon learned that it was well to keep within easy reach of Buck, who was his refuge as far as the buffalo were concerned.

He occasionally came across Indian signs,—an old abandoned camp, or a trail where an entire village had been moving, the dragging of their lodge-poles making a very plain track—and on one or two occasions met with friendly hunting parties. One advantage he had in riding his buffalo

was that he left no trail which an inquisitive and hostile Indian could translate as connected with a white man. Bison-tracks covered the earth in all directions, and Buck's were just like the rest. If he had been riding a pony, Bennie did not doubt that he would have had a bunch of Indians trailing him long before. Since he traveled upon a buffalo, however, his most advantageous course was to keep where the bison were most plentiful; so he went in the thick of the herd.

Three weeks more he journeyed to the northwest, going along the course of the Missouri, or keeping near to it, and the wonder of the land and the countless inconceivable host of the bison grew upon him all the time. Three weeks more carried him well up into what is now Southern Dakota, and still the numbers of bison grew, rather than diminished. But what would our young explorer have thought

could he have seen the landscape as a whole, for six or eight hundred miles to the northwest and the north? What would he have said if you had told him that he could have traveled for two months more, away up through the Dakotas into what is now Montana, and almost to the Canadian border, and that nearly every hillside in all that distance would have been dotted with buffalo; that to the north through what is now North Dakota, they were just as thick, an innumerable host, like the trees in an endless forest, always stretching on with new vistas ahead, overwhelming in their countless array? If you had told him these things, he might have been incredulous, which would not have been strange, for old hunters, who have pursued buffalo all their lives, have been thunder-struck when they have gone upon such an exploration as this.

One day on the fifth week of his journey Bennie came to a rather large creek flowing

down from the north and emptying into the Missouri, and for a diversion he left the larger river to follow the creek.

After a two days' journey he discovered that it was a favorite feeding-ground for the bison. For a mile on each side the creek was flanked with a beautiful meadow which reminded Bennie of the home acres. Upon these meadows the grass was still green and the feeding was excellent.

One evening, just at dusk, he came out upon the top of a swell about two miles from the creek. The weather, that had been ideal for the entire trip, was now threatening. Heavy thunder-heads were rolling up in the west, and even while he gazed at the lowering clouds, a low rumble of thunder was heard. For five minutes Bennie sat watching the storm develop, and then he thought of shelter. The bison seemed ill at ease. Low complaining bellows came floating over the prairies from every direction, min-

gled with the disturbed bleatings of calves. It was as though the herd shared the tumult in the breast of mother nature.

Then came a bright flash of lightning and a heavy peal of thunder and the bison began massing in small compact bunches. These in turn gravitated toward a common center, and almost before Bennie was aware of what was happening, he and Buck were in the midst of a great restless multitude of bison which stretched away for a dozen rods in every direction. His first thought was to get out of the crush, but he soon saw that it was impossible, for with each passing minute, new bunches joined themselves with the large herd, until it was half a mile across. This much Bennie saw before the clouds settled over the earth so thickly that he could no longer discern the herd stretching away in every direction. An intense excitement ran like an electric current through

the great herd. It was communicated from animal to animal by rapid breathing, tossings of the head and jerkings of the short spike-like tails, and the stamping of many hoofs. The very air was surcharged with excitement.

With each successive flash of lightning and each reverberating peal of thunder, the crowding and pushing, snorting and stamping increased until the entire mass was turbulent like an angry sea, tossing this way and that.

To add to the confusion, the air was filled with deep, angry bellows, low moans from crowding bulls, and long, quavering lows from anxious cows, who feared that their calves might be killed in the crush, while their lusty offspring added to the din by calling loudly and persistently for their dams.

For half an hour more Buck and Bennie crowded and pushed, fighting for their

position in the excited herd, while the lightning and the thunder constantly increased. Then for a minute there was a lull in the fireworks of the heavens; but the elements were merely gathering strength, for presently there was a flash so bright that Bennie saw the entire herd as plainly as though it had been broad daylight. The great shaggy heads of the bulls with their black beards and their eyes, usually mild enough, now blazing with fear and rage, loomed up before him. For a thousandth part of a second every detail of the scene stood out like a hideous nightmare; then there was a peal of thunder that seemed fairly to crack the heavens. Again and again it rolled from horizon to zenith, snapping and snarling like the very demon of destruction.

The pent-up fear of the herd now broke all bounds. For a moment they swayed this way and that, and then with one impulse they were off, crowding, pushing,

thundering, pounding, making the solid earth to shake as though with the passing of an earthquake.

At first, the herd moved slowly, just as an avalanche or any other of the great destructive forces of nature move, but like the avalanche it gained headway with each passing second. With each added moment the pounding of tens of thousands of hoofs grew louder until it was like the constant thunder of mighty breakers upon the beetling cliffs.

Sometimes they were crowded together like cattle in a cattle car, and then they would sway apart, and there was freedom for both man and beast. Whither they were going, God only knew. Bennie had no idea whether it was north, south, east, or west, whether they were out in the open prairie or still in the meadows, whether the next ten jumps would carry them safely over the solid earth, or whether they would

plunge, a horrible frenzied mass, into a coulee or a canyon.

But one thing was certain, whether the way was smooth, or rough, the herd would still sweep on. What would it matter if a few score head went into the bottom of a gulch to bridge over the crevasse that the rest might cross? The entire mass was fear-mad, wholly without sense of wisdom, even without their usual intuition, rushing like a tidal wave, a sea of tense muscles and straining sinews, to what end no one could tell.

Bennie dropped the little rifle that he treasured above almost any other possession in the world, and buried his hands in the long thick hair of Buck. He set his teeth hard and gripped the sides of the buffalo with his legs. The roar of those myriad hoofs was like constant thunder in his ears. His heart was sick within him. Would he ever see home and friends again?

Then he wished with all his soul that he had not come upon this expedition. Why had he not heeded his mother's advice and stayed peacefully at home? If they were to plunge into an abyss, he would be ground to pulp. His friends would not even know what had become of him. There would be no one to tell of his tragic fate.

The smell of the heated, straining wild cattle rose pungently to his nostrils. Was the whole world one rushing, seething herd of maddened bisons? So it seemed to the terrified boy.

Once Buck plunged into a deep hole and Bennie nearly lost his seat, but by a great effort the buffalo recovered himself and they thundered on. Bennie shuddered to think what would have become of him had the bison fallen. This experience was barely over when the buffalo began floundering about as though in a quagmire.

Mud and water were thrown up in showers. Twice Buck seemed stuck beyond hope of recovering his power to move. But with mighty wrenchings he freed himself and swept on with the rest of the floundering mass.

For five minutes more they thundered on and then suddenly the herd seemed jamming in front of them. Buck sheered off to the right, making his way through a little opening that had appeared at just the nick of time. Then he gave a great leap down a steep bank and Bennie nearly went over his head. But slipping and sliding the buffalo came to good footing again, and after scrambling up a corresponding bank they again swept on with the herd.

It was now raining hard and the thunder and lightning had ceased. Gradually the herd slackened its pace. By degrees the thunder of their myriad hoofs grew less, and just as the madness had come upon

them, it went. They slowed down to a trot, then to a walk.

The clouds now rolled away and the moon came out. By its rather dim light, Bennie could see the great herd slowly disintegrating, the large herd breaking up into small ones, and these in turn gradually spreading out into the old company, like feeding cattle in the home pasture in Indiana.

With a great sigh of relief, and a silent prayer to heaven, returning thanks for his escape, just as his mother had taught him to do for little things when he was a small child, Bennie slid to the ground and felt himself over. He seemed to be entirely whole. Buck, too, was all right, only he was covered with mud from head to tail. But the principal thing was that they were safe. Then and there the boy vowed that with the coming daylight he would start for home and not risk his neck any more in this wildcat manner.

The following morning Bennie went back over the trail of the stampede as nearly as he could, looking for the little rifle that he prized so highly, but found nothing of it, although he made some discoveries concerning the stampede.

He found that the gulch into which they had plunged, when he had been so nearly unseated, varied greatly in depth. In some places it was twenty or thirty feet deep, while in others there was merely a sharply sloping bank. It was at such a point that he and Buck must have made their passage.

At one point, where it was deeper than anywhere else, there was a pitiful sight, for the crevasse had been filled entirely full of buffalo and the rest of the herd had passed over upon the bodies of their fallen comrades.

The gorge was still piled with dead and maimed bison, many of them kicking and thrashing, and their bawling and moaning could be heard for a mile.

He also found the morass through which he and Buck had plunged their way. They had been more fortunate than many of the herd, for scores of bison still foundered in the quicksands, some of them just showing above the black earth which was soon to engulf them.

Heart-sick at such sights, and shuddering at what he had so narrowly missed, Bennie turned Buck's head southward, and started back toward the Missouri with all possible speed.

One more adventure he had that might have had a tragic ending, but did not.

He had nearly reached the Missouri and was riding leisurely along, just at dusk, when he noticed a great commotion among the buffalo half a mile behind him. He was upon a rise in the prairie and in a good position to see, so stopped for a moment to investigate.

Presently the cause for their fright was

apparent, for half a dozen mounted Indians were discovered riding among them, shooting with bow and arrows instead of fire-arms. That was why their approach had been so silent, and Bennie had known nothing of the hunt until this stirring scene came almost under his eyes. Presently he could hear the excited yells of the Indians, and as he did not know whether they were peaceful or hostile, and as all Indians were more or less dangerous, he started Buck forward at his best pace and rode hard all night and all the next day.

At last familiar scenes, peculiarities in the landscape that he had noted in the trip up, began to reappear. Finally he was able so to time the return trip that he could stop at his old camping-places each night. Now his only thought was to get back home, so he bent his every energy to covering the distance between himself and father and mother and brother.

On the way out, he had often gone aside from his course for half a day, but now there were no digressions of this nature. Something, perhaps it was the wind, seemed to be whispering "Home, Home, Home," and the great Missouri also took up the refrain and roared it at all her shallows.

Three weeks brought the broad La Platte River again in sight. This was the beginning of the end. Four or five days more would finish the long journey.

These last few days seemed like weeks, the home hunger was now so great. Bennie rode late into the evening each day and broke camp before daylight.

The fourth day at about noon he thought he saw a wolf upon a distant rise in the prairie. The figure was certainly that of a wolf. Then upon the clear air, which carries sound to a great distance, he heard a high-keyed bark, and the wolf came rushing toward him like a mad creature. For

once Bennie was wholly deceived and reached down for the Colt's revolver, but in another minute faithful old Shep came bounding over a near-by swell, barking gleefully at every jump. Frantically he leaped upon Buck's back beside his young master and Bennie hugged him with all his might. He was only a dog but there was something almost human in Shep's greeting, and when Bennie remembered that his faithful friend had come five miles up the river to meet him, a great lump gathered in the boy's throat.

What a strange sense it was, too, that had told Shep that his master was near. They made the rest of the trip together upon the buffalo's back, and two hours later the meadows and the log cabin and all the well-remembered scenes came in sight, and the strange journey was over.

CHAPTER V

THE NEW KING

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THE very next day after the return from their long journey Bennie and Buck went to work at the fall ploughing. They had played so long that this work was late, so now there could be no more dallying.

From this time on until snow flew they must go up and down the long furrows, whether they liked it or not. Bennie could think of his trip, and recounting the many wonderful things that he had seen helped to vary the monotony. If Buck remembered, he gave no sign, but Bennie was inclined to think in after years that he was thinking in his dim ox-like way, all that autumn while they were doing the ploughing.

One thing was certain, whether it was

the trip or some other silent influence, this autumn marked a change in the disposition of Buck. Of course it was gradual, but it was nevertheless sure.

Before the buffalo had been as stolid as an ox,—all patience, slow in his movements, slow to comprehend, and never ruffled by anything. Never had he shown the slightest sign of temper up to this autumn.

But he now became restive. He would sometimes stamp the ground and paw as though irritated by something. He would also jerk his head and twitch his tail when the whip flicked him, as though impatient of being goaded about by this ever-tickling lash.

At first Bennie thought his collar must hurt him and readjusted it, but that made no difference. Buck was clearly out of sorts with the world, or with his lot, or with something.

He would not stand the teasing of his

old friend Shep as formerly: when the dog nipped at his heels in play he would lash out viciously at him, and if Shep undertook to snap at his nose in fun, he would lunge at him savagely.

His eye too lost something of its mild ox-like expression and a sullen fire was often seen to glow in its depths.

When Buck finally balked and refused to draw the plough for a whole half day Bennie was thunderstruck. What did it mean? He coaxed and whipped and then coaxed again but all to no purpose.

When he told Shep to nip the buffalo's heels, Buck lashed out so viciously that he sent the poor dog sprawling, to his great astonishment and disgust.

Bennie finally saw that there was nothing to do but wait upon the bison's pleasure, so he unhitched Ulysses and went to harrowing with the mule. For a whole half day Buck stood in the furrow gazing off across

the prairies, not turning his head this way or that, but just gazing sullenly ahead.

Finally, after dark his young master coaxed him into the stable. On the morrow he was back in the harness working as before, but he could never be depended upon again, for every three or four days he would balk, and nothing could budge him.

After the snows came and he was stabled for the better part of the time, he seemed to get over this restlessness and sullenness, and would again allow Shep to ride him to the creek and bark and caper about him, but with the return of spring the old fit was upon him again. Now he seemed even more restive than in the fall and he would paw and stamp and throw his head from side to side at the slightest provocation. He clearly was out of sorts with all the world, and particularly with his own lot, but what was the matter no one seemed to know just then.

One afternoon, when they had been ploughing only three days, Buck balked just as he had done in the autumn and when Bennie pulled the harness from him and threw it on the ground he kicked up his heels and started for the creek at his best pace.

Shep happened to be in the field near by, watching some magpies, which were following the plough, pick up worms, and Bennie called to him to go after the bison. Nothing loath, Shep started after the truant, barking gleefully as much as to say, "I will bring him back in a few minutes. You just see." But strange to relate, his master did not see either him or the buffalo again that day. Not that day nor that week. In fact, it was eight years before Bennie again set eyes upon Buck, and Shep only returned after the lapse of four months, and then he came dragging himself painfully home, nearly dead with hunger and suffering.

Shep, like his master, did not doubt his ability to bring Buck back in a few minutes, although whether he would be willing to work any more that day or not was quite another question. So the faithful dog galloped after the runaway buffalo. When Buck reached the creek, instead of stopping to drink and wade about in the shallows as Shep had expected, the bison plunged into the river and waded across. There was nothing for Shep to do but follow, so he swam across and started after Buck, who had struck off across the meadows going up the creek parallel with it. Shep got upon the outside of him and by springing at his nose and snapping, tried to head him back toward home, but Buck would not be headed. He only lunged savagely at the dog when he got too persistent and kept on his way as though he knew quite well where he was going.

When he had followed the creek for two

or three miles, he again crossed it and turned back toward the river, coming out several miles above the Andersons' homestead. In this manner he had entirely circled the farm and was now well above it on his way northward.

At this point Shep made a desperate effort to turn the bison back south. He snapped at his nose until Buck was in a frenzy and would have done him real injury if he could have gotten within reach of him, but with that remarkable agility that collie and shepherd dogs have, in common with wolves, he always kept just out of reach and at the same time was within snapping distance.

Seeing that Buck could not be turned in this way, he tried snapping at his heels, which caused Buck to lash out savagely at him every time he came within reach. One thing was sure,—he had lost all control over the bison ; and another thing was also

certain,—Buck was headed northward, and was evidently intent on running away from his master.

What was poor Shep to do? He had never failed his master yet. When he had been told to bring home anything, whether it was a steer or old Buck, he had always done it. So he kept after the truant with a dogged persistency that did not let up though the task seemed almost hopeless. For three days they kept up what might be called a running fight, Buck trotting or walking as best suited him and Shep constantly going before him and barking and snapping, trying to head him back, or worrying at his heels. Sometimes the buffalo would stop to feed, and then Shep would sit down upon his haunches and watch him, or perhaps he would stray off for a little distance to see if he could catch a gopher, or dig out a mole or a field-mouse. At such times Buck would take advantage and

try to slip away and throw his friend off the scent, but the sure nose of Shep always took up the trail and after perhaps half an hour he would come panting up with the unruly buffalo.

Finally late in the afternoon of the third day a painful accident befell the dog. In jumping down the side of a coulee after the fleeing bison, he stuck a savage stub nearly through his paw. This would not have been so bad but the stub broke off and left a bad sliver in the wounded member.

For half an hour more Shep limped after his charge on three legs, occasionally whimpering, or stopping to bite at his paw, trying vainly to extricate the stub ; but finally the foot swelled so badly that he was obliged to give up and sit down upon a hillock and see Buck gallop away toward the westering sun free from pursuit.

Then began two or three very miserable

days for Shep. His paw swelled to twice its natural size, and pained him constantly. He was obliged to lie still by the river and doctor his wound the best he could. He dug a small hole in the clay bank of the river and buried his paw in the clay. This helped to draw out the inflammation.

Finally the brave dog performed a surgical operation. Biting open the upper side of his paw, although it made him whimper and quiver, he got hold of the end of the stub with his teeth and pulled it out. He then rinsed and rinsed the throbbing paw in the river, thus washing out all the pus, and finally began a licking process which he kept up every few minutes for a day or two. It was surprising how soon under this simple ministration the wound began to heal.

It is not generally known, but a dog's saliva is both antiseptic and healing, so that when the dog licked the sores of Lazarus,

that afflicted man really had the very best kind of a doctor.

It was four days after the accident, though, before Shep was enabled again to take up the trail of the fugitive, which by this time was entirely cold, and could not be followed by scent.

One would naturally think that the dog would have turned his nose homeward. The trail was cold and his particular bison was like a needle in a haymow upon these endless plains. But his master's orders, "Go bring Buck," were still ringing in his ears, and he could not return without him.

So Shep started on up the river, feeling quite sure that the bison was headed in that direction and that he would not go so very far from it. For a whole day he did not see a sign of his friend, but the second evening he found hoof prints in the sand where he thought Buck had come down to a creek to drink. It was the print of a bison's hoof,

and although Shep sniffed at it several times he could not be sure that it was Buck's track, for all scent had left it. But the finding of this hoof print encouraged Shep and he redoubled his efforts and fled on to the northwest, following by instinct the best he could.

In the meantime faithless old Buck had apparently made good his escape. He had gone over the same route that he and his master had traveled the autumn before. This was probably what he had been dreaming of in his stupid ox-like way all the time. The naturalist who says that certain animals do not possess memories, and very good ones, does not share my own opinion. I have frequently had a horse turn in at some forgotten barway or wood road, where I had driven him so long before that all memory of it had escaped me. Perhaps it was five years or maybe it was even ten, but the horse's memory was sure.

So it was with Buck. He doubtless recalled so well the way which he and his master had journeyed, that he could have gone over the trail with more certainty than his master could have driven him. But when he came near any of the towns or settlements where they had stopped before, he made a long détour and came out on the trail beyond the towns. Whether he feared that some one might drive him back home, or whether it was his natural wild instinct asserting itself, who shall say?

Having scouted the towns safely he pressed on with all speed, at last reaching the Missouri and following it up into the very heart of the land of the bison. As he journeyed, the impatience that he had felt at the outset grew upon him. There was something in that vast lonely prairie land that he wanted, wanted above all else in the world. It was not feed, it was not water, for he had both in abundance. It

was probably partly a longing for his kind, for he was an alien in the settlement of man. His place was in the great herds. Man had stolen away his freedom. So freedom and a longing for his kind was a part of his great desire, but there was still something else.

He did not discover what it was until one moonlight night when he had penetrated far into the Dakotas. He had seen many bison but had not become familiar with them. It was as though he lacked the real buffalo code or speech. None of his wild kindred seemed to fraternize with him. The bulls usually began pawing the dirt about their heads and bellowing in anger when he appeared, and the cows and calves seemed rather afraid of him. The fact was, Buck was a mighty buffalo bull, larger by two or three hundred pounds than any that he met. His work upon the farm had made him much stronger than the

ordinary bull, but he was a Goliath who knew not his strength.

On this moonlight night in question he was wandering about in a restless manner, seeking something, yet not knowing just what he sought, when he heard near at hand a high-keyed, prolonged bellow that somehow sounded sweet to his ears. You or I would have thought it a very dismal call, but to Buck it was the sound for which he had long been waiting. So he hurried to find the stranger, all elation, blowing great breaths that looked like steam from his nostrils.

Down by the creek he found her, a young heifer bison. She was standing knee-deep in the water drinking. When he came in sight she again lifted her head and sent her tremulous bellow across the plains.

Buck hurried forward and waded into the water beside her. He thrust his great shaggy head close to her neck and she

turned partly about and touched his nose with hers. As her warm breath filled his nostrils and her rough tongue stole out to caress his muzzle, Buck knew that he had found that for which he sought.

The bison do not mate permanently as do the deer family, being more bigamous, but Buck and the young heifer stuck closely to each other for several days, and this was as near a honeymoon as he could come.

The company of the young heifer satisfied the longing that had made him so restless ever since he had gone into the land of the bison, but there was still another passion within that would not let him rest.

Every time one of the belligerent bulls threw up dust and bellowed defiantly at him, he felt this passion. It was the growing lust for battle, the natural rage of the male against all other males, which might be possible rivals,—rivals in love or war.

It is the nature of the male, be it man or

animal, to want to dominate. This passion makes both mighty generals and King Bison.

So as the battle lust grew upon Buck, he began taking up the challenge of those who defied him, and soon discovered that most of them were no match for him. Each bull that he discomfited added to his pride and his love of battle. So it was not long before he was constantly on the war-path, looking for a bull who should stand and give battle to the death when he challenged.

The fighting of the bull buffalo is not as scientific as that of bull moose. He has not the dexterity of the moose. Hence there could be no fine sword-play, with thrust and parry, advance and retreat.

With the bison it was more a matter of direct attack. To break down your adversary's guard, to rip him in the side of the neck, or to make him turn tail and then bury the sharp horns deep in his soft un-

protected flanks,—this was the bison's form of warfare.

But challenging everything that he met soon brought Buck an adversary that tried his last ounce of strength and his utmost cunning, and even then he might have paid the price of his life for his belligerence, had not chance favored him.

It was about a week after Buck's first meeting with the young bison heifer, and that diversion had partly worn off and he was ripe for another venture. This morning, after getting his fill of grass, he had been restlessly roaming up and down, uttering defiant bellows and putting smaller bulls to flight almost as soon as they saw him, when he came to a high butte about two miles back from the creek which he was then following. There was a small herd of mature bulls about the base of the butte and there was some excitement among them, for they moved restlessly to and fro.

Buck pressed in among them, pushing his great hulk from point to point like the giant he was. Soon he came to the foot of the butte where he could see its summit plainly and there upon the crest of the eminence was the mightiest bison bull that he had ever seen. He was standing with head lowered pawing up dirt until a small cloud of dust partly enveloped him, but one could still discern his blood-red eyes that blazed defiantly through the dust. He was clearly outlined against the sky and the morning sun, which was just rising, made a gorgeous background for the mighty King of the Plains, for this was the lordly ruler of all the bison in the northwest country.

By this I do not mean that his government was anything very definite. He simply dominated all the smaller herds of which the larger herd was composed. His coat was much darker than his fellows, being a dark rich chestnut. In some

lights, or when it was wet, it looked quite black.

There seemed to be some dissension brewing among the bulls who thronged at the foot of the butte, for every few minutes one of their number would start to ascend as though to attack the King upon his throne.

But his courage would soon forsake him and he would satisfy himself by pawing and bellowing.

Finally there was one, more adventuresome than the rest, who charged to the top of the bluff, where for a few seconds he held his own. But he was soon discomfited and came ignominiously rushing back down the steep slopes of the butte, his flanks dripping blood, and limping badly in one of his hind legs.

For half an hour Buck watched the manœuvres of the rest of the bulls, his own battle spirit growing with each passing minute.

Finally after the bull who had returned in such hot haste had gone, he crowded to the front and began slowly to ascend the hill, keeping his eyes fixed upon the King all the time, and occasionally pausing to paw and bellow, by which means he probably was getting up his courage for the combat.

The King eyed him belligerently through his cloud of dust but gave no sign that he saw him or considered him as a possible rival.

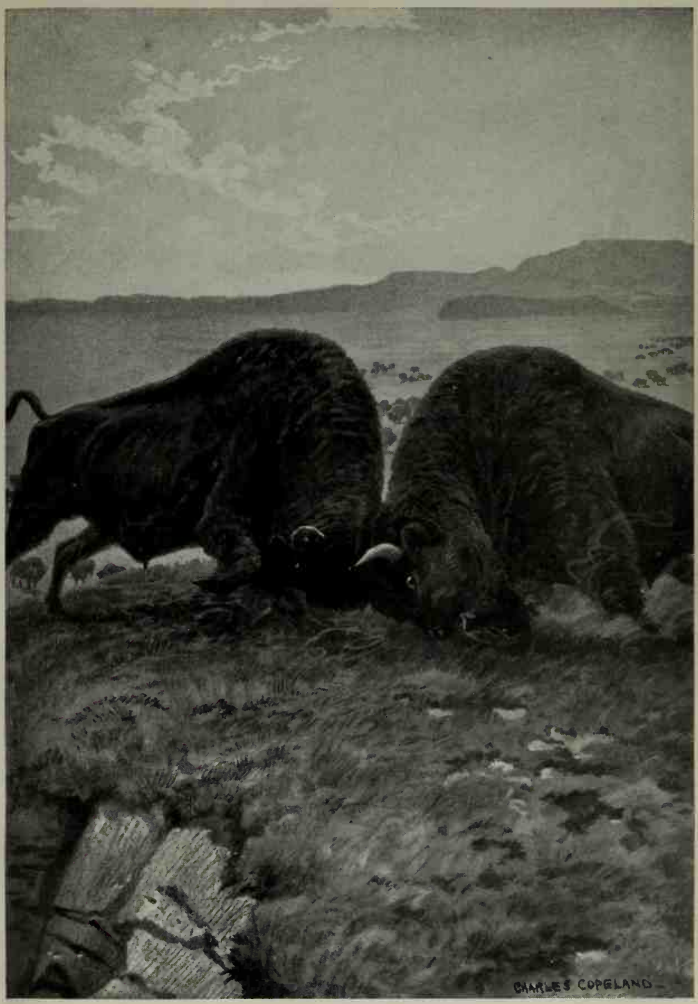
He let Buck come to the very top of the butte and advance partly across the top and then he charged like the mighty mountain of fighting muscle and sinew that he was.

Buck braced himself and met the King squarely and the shock of their great heads was terrible, but Buck did not give way. Instead he sank his hoofs deep in the soil and pushed, hooking this way and that,

thinking to get by the King's guard and rip him in the side of the head ; but the King was an experienced fighter and he shifted his head each time to meet Buck's movements.

Then Buck tried a new stratagem. He shifted his weight to one side and let the King push him back for several yards, thinking to get at the King's side in this manner, but nothing was gained, as they merely changed ground a little and neither had the advantage.

For fifteen minutes like mighty giants they strode and the ground was ploughed deep by their hoofs. Sweat stood upon their flanks and foam dripped from their muzzles. Their breaths came in deep gasps like a blacksmith's bellows. Occasionally a deep grunt escaped from one or the other as the battle swayed. Buck received a bad wound in the jowl, and he in turn gashed the King in the cheek.



THE SEASONED FIGHTER DROVE BUCK TO THE SIDE OF THE BUTTE

Blood was now added to the foam. It dripped from their long black beards and stained the ground, but neither of the great giants allowed his guard to be broken down, and in that was safety to each.

Once the antagonist got by the broad head. Those sharp upcurved horns could do deadly work in the unprotected parts.

It was to be a battle of endurance, a struggle for main strength and for breath. He who could still stand, when the other had become too weak to keep up the fight, would clearly be victor.

Here Buck's many hard days' work at the plough stood him in good stead. He was not quite as heavy as the King, but more muscular.

The minutes dragged on and neither had the advantage. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty went by and still they fought on.

Finally by a mighty effort the seasoned fighter drove Buck close to a precipitate

side of the butte. If he gave ten feet more he would be rolled over the side and go tumbling down to an ignominious defeat.

Perhaps it was merely an accident, or maybe the King had played the trick before. But Buck had now to hold his ground or go down to defeat. His breath came in deep gasps. He had been so long straining to his utmost pound of strength that his sight grew dim merely from the effort. Gradually he felt his strength waning. Inch by inch the King began forcing him back again. Two desperate stands he made of a few seconds each, but he was clearly weakening. His hour had nearly struck.

At the very second when he seemed defeated, his power to resist all but gone, there came from behind the heels of the struggling King a high-keyed bark that somehow had a familiar sound to the ears of Buck. He had heard that bark somewhere before, but he was too dazed to know just where.

But there was something doing in the King's rear that it behooved him to take notice of, although he was hardly in a position to do so, for an infuriated shepherd dog was ripping away at the great cord just above his hock with teeth like those of a wolf. Slash, slash, went the shepherd's jaws, not gripping to hold, but slashing like a wolf,—the stroke that cuts deep and severs.

The King's mighty hind-quarters were strained to their utmost. The great sinew was tense as the guy rope upon a derrick, so at the second slash the sinews parted and the leg sank beneath the weight of the King. His hind-quarters collapsed. He was borne back, faster and faster, until the struggling bulls had reached the farther side of the butte; then he went rolling ignominiously over the side and into the waiting herd below. A King no more, but a crippled three-legged old bull, henceforth

an outcast and the legitimate prey for the gray pack that always skulked upon the outskirts of the herd.

Buck had barely recovered from the surprise of his sudden victory when he was treated to another, for with a joyous bark his old friend Shep leaped in his face, licking his bleeding muzzle with his long, soft caressing tongue.

For a few minutes they stood thus,—Shep licking his old comrade's wounds and Buck permitting himself to be caressed. Then Shep leaped upon Buck's back, just as he had done in the good old days, and they started down the side of the butte to rejoin the rest of the herd.

At first some of the bulls were inclined to do battle with the new King, for that was what Buck had become by his defeat of the old King, but when they beheld the strange figure of Shep upon the new King's back, they were uncertain. A moment

they stood eyeing the new combination doubtfully, and then most of them fled precipitately. They had no thought of fighting with an adversary that carried a wolf upon his back.

But faithful Shep was delighted with the turn things had taken. For weeks he had followed, going only by instinct. Sometimes he thought he was on the right track, and then he would have no clue for days. But doggedly he had hung on until his patience had been rewarded, as patience like his always is, and he had found Buck for his master.

But Buck had no mind to be driven back home. Again and again Shep tried, nipping at his heels and growling and barking, trying every art known to a cattle dog, but all of no avail. So he finally cast in his lot with the new King, going wherever he went, often riding upon his back, and sometimes trotting by his side.

To the herd he was a wolf, partly feared and also despised. He had been a wolf to the herd all these weary weeks. Often he had been obliged to skulk for his life, but occasionally too a dead calf had helped him to subsist when he might otherwise have gone hungry. Once a bunch of a dozen bulls had surrounded him just as they did sometimes with an old gray wolf, and the poor dog had all but lost his life. Like a death-circle they had closed in with lowered heads and sledge-hammer hoofs, so close-planted that the beleaguered dog could not escape between them. When they had come within striking distance, he had sprung like a flash upon the back of the nearest bull, and before the astonished bison knew what had happened he had bounded to the back of another, and with a great jump had gained the outside of the death-circle and escaped with his life.

What a long, long, lonely hunt it had

been. But all that was over now. He had found Buck, and perhaps the truant would go back home with him soon. These must have been the indefinite dog thoughts of Shep as he journeyed with the herd, as it began slowly moving southward on its annual autumn migration. The herd followed good feed, and grass was not to be found where the frost had laid its withering touch; so it gradually drifted to the south, although you could hardly call it a migration in the usual sense of the word. It was too leisurely and too much without purpose.

But if the new King and his wolf companion were feared by all the herd,—for it is the way of animals to fear things they do not understand,—the old King went the way of all old Kings, be they brute or human. In his wounded and crippled condition he could not fight the battle of life as he had done before, and he had

many enemies among the herd. Too many had felt his sharp horns in days gone by not to hate him now.

So they paid off old grudges and the old King's days were one continual fight in which he was always worsted. He was not sorry, therefore, when the gray pack which always attends to cases like his ran him into a pocket in a coulee and gradually wore him out. For days he stood with his back to the walls, fighting his last fight, and then they pulled him down and began their feast even before life had fully left him. Such was the horrible end of the old King according to the cruel law of nature, which decrees that the strong shall rule until they become weak and then they shall be the prey of vultures, or of jackals. Even the dead Arabian steed is no better crow-bait than the homely plough-horse.

CHAPTER VI

THE RIGHT OF WAY

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NUMBER one hundred and ninety, the latest model and the most powerful locomotive that the Baldwin works had ever put out, fresh in her new coat of paint, and burnished brass and steel, the pride of the Union Pacific Railroad and the envy of the mechanical world, came thundering and clanking down track number twenty-three and butted into the fourteen elegant cars of the Overland Flyer with such force that a shudder ran through the long train to its very end.

Nervous women started and said oh, and men wondered why the engineer didn't use more care in backing down to a train like this. The president of the road in his

special car, which had been attached to the Flyer for this special run, an event in the history of the road, growled his disapproval of the jolt that his car got.

A few minutes later another locomotive, the exact counterpart of the first, came hissing down the track and backed up to the train.

These mighty engines and this train of cars were the best that money could buy, and the trip for which they were making up was to mark an epoch in railroading. It was only three years before that the last glittering rail of this great system had been spiked down, and we had been the proud owners of the first trans-continental railroad in the world. America, the home of the locomotive, was well in the lead in construction of railroads. An attempt was now to be made to lower the running time from Chicago to Oakland by several hours. Hence this new train, the pride of the road.

All was confusion and bustle. Drays loaded mountains high came rumbling over the stone floored platform, bringing trunks, valises and baggage of all descriptions. Still other baggage was being tumbled from other vehicles into the baggage-car with deafening sound. Porters with both hands gripping heavy valises escorted fashionable passengers to the train. Hackmen, with less ease and more bustle, were performing the same tasks for their fares. There was the constant scuff of myriad feet, punctuated by the staccato echoes of impatient boot-heels which resounded in the more distant and lofty portions of the spacious building. All was bustle and jostle, push and squeeze. Haste was the one thought of all that rushing, pushing throng.

Men and women of all ages were there, although for the better part it was an aristocratic company. But still there were many types of the frontier life, which the men

used to this new hustling West could easily tell one from another.

There was the rich cattle buyer, talking and gesticulating to a group of ranchmen; a drover and a bunch of cowboys, who had evidently brought their cattle to Chicago and who were now traveling in state, going home upon the fastest and best train on the continent. There were mine owners and prospectors and occasionally an adventurer whose calling was not so clearly defined.

But all were now intent in getting aboard. The warning bell upon the locomotive was sounding. In another minute or two they would be off for that record run which was to reduce the time from Chicago to the Pacific coast.

There were hurried good-byes from the car steps, the flutter of handkerchiefs from car windows, shouted admonitions and farewells; then the conductor waved his arm to the engineer, who was leaning out of the

cab-window watching for the signal, and swung onto the train. Slowly the powerful wheels upon the huge locomotives began to revolve, and the Overland Flyer moved cautiously out of the depot on its time-breaking trip.

Carefully, for they were not really off yet, as the engineer would have said, they wound their way in and out among the great buildings of this, the congested part of the city. Across busy streets, where the human ants swarmed like myriad insects; over culverts that spanned narrow and congested streets; through deep cuts that passed under other thoroughfares; bumping over switches and cross-tracks, feeling their way carefully, for they were still within the confines of the city, where there was a speed limit, and all these swarming ants that came and went over and under the tracks were human beings with lives and limbs that had to be considered.

By degrees the streets grew less and less congested and the way became clearer. The buildings were not so high as they had been and there were occasional vacant lots, a sure indication that the suburbs were in sight.

Then they passed simple cottages of the rural type, and after fifteen or twenty minutes of patient crawling along the rails, the broad unobstructed prairies opened out before them,—limitless as the sky and nearly level as far as the railroad was concerned, for all of the deeper swells had been slightly filled and their tops cut down, so that there was almost no grade from Chicago to the Mississippi River, several hundred miles away.

Williams, the engineer, heaved a deep sigh of relief and pulled the throttle nearly wide open. "I always feel better when I get this far along," he said to the fireman. "It does me good to give the old girl her head. The city kinder suffocates me and I am mighty afraid I'll run over somebody or

something, but out here it is different. This is the kind of country for me," and he pointed with his finger out of the cab-window to the free, far horizon across the Illinois prairies.

With the throwing open of the throttle, the powerful engine shot forward like a mighty steed given its head;—not with a sudden spurt, for the long train behind prohibited that, but with steady insistence.

Each moment the clamor of the car-wheels behind and the pounding of the mighty drivers upon the rails became more thunderous. Black smoke poured from her funnel and the blow of the escaping steam, each time the valves shifted their position, was like the beating of a strong heart. It was a heart, the heart of the great locomotive which pushed with herculean strength, as the giant machine unloosed itself and let go its pounding drivers and pulsating piston.

On sped the long luxuriant train like a whirlwind, a mighty force that nothing could withstand. The white fury of the steam had been caught by impotent little man and taught to slave for him, to drive this hissing, roaring dragon of commerce far across the great plains.

Across the plains as the whirlwind goes; with a force that would never tire; that knew no hardship; by an engine whose parts never ached or broke. Such was the mighty steed of steel that roared over culverts and into deep cuts; that caused strong trestles to shake with its passing and the solid earth to tremble where it trod.

Through waving corn-fields and billowing acres of wheat it rushed; for these were the days in Illinois when wheat had not been entirely supplanted by corn; by straggling villages which were too insignificant for it to deign to stop; over rivers where it crept upon a bridge of seeming spider-web,

where it would surely go crashing into the watery depths beneath. Yet it always escaped, and hissing, roaring and pounding, sped on.

Across the broad unobstructed plains its shrieking whistle could be heard for ten miles and the vast pillar of steam and smoke that it builded against the blue intense sky could be seen for twice that distance. Sometimes it would be nearly half an hour after that first faint streak of blue mist was seen on the utmost horizon, before the monster finally went shrieking and thundering past. Farmers were often heard to boast that in a clear day, after first seeing the smoke signal, they could put up their team, change their clothes and then drive to the depot if it was not more than a mile, and still catch the train.

It was a land of thrift and plenty through which the long train sped. Farms of hundreds and thousands of acres, the richest

land in the world, stretched away upon every side. The landscape was dotted with farm buildings. Cattle and horses threw up their heads and gazed after the flying monster. Groups of small boys gathered upon the platforms in towns to watch the Flyer go through. But they stopped not for town or small city. Only the largest cities were of enough importance to be noticed. The precious moments which the car-wheels were clicking off at the end of each rail were altogether too precious to be wasted at unimportant places.

These same small boys could have told you that the rails began to click while the train was still half a mile away, and that the track was warm for a minute or two after it passed, for it was an engine of energy, the most powerful force that man had yet mastered, furious at being chained, mad with pent-up desire, trying to burst the strong boilers, trying to blow out the

cylinder heads, trying to tear to pieces all the many cranks and levers that controlled it, yet spending its fury against them in vain, and in furtherance of the wishes of man, that impotent creature who sat in the cab, one hand upon the whistle-cord, and the other upon the throttle, making this fury, this fiend, this steam, do his bidding.

Hour after hour slipped by, and still there was no pausing, no rest for the pounding monster. The sun touched the zenith and slowly slid down the western slope of the blue sky. When it was half way down to the horizon the great river was passed and they thundered into another metropolis, less important than that from which they had started. Here there was a stop for a few minutes, while the great hissing, blowing steed was watered, for even a steed like that gets thirsty upon such a long, hard run across such dry plains. The smoking-boxes were oiled, more coal went

into the tender, and more into the fire-box; more water into the boilers and a new engineer into the cab. Again the wheels began to turn slowly as they crept out through the congested city into the plains, where there was room for even such a great monster as this to move.

Now the furious red eye of the monster pierced the gloom ahead, for it was getting dark. For hundreds of feet this bright shaft lit the glittering rails. Like a great gleaming auger it bored its way just so far ahead of the thundering drive-wheels into the darkness.

No matter how hard the locomotive raced, yet this bright shaft always kept just so far ahead. It showed trestlework and deep cut, river and creek, straggling village and dreary waste,—all the endless panorama of the plains, a moment seen and then swallowed up in the darkness.

The man at the throttle sat with tense

nerves and ready hand peering along this bright shaft of light. If there was need of vigilance by daylight, there was much more need now. Then the distances were vast, now it was only a few hundred feet in their immediate front.

By ten o'clock the train stopped again at a small town to water the thirsty, panting engine. But the towns were getting smaller and the farm buildings more scattering.

The engineer was busy oiling the engine and did not see the boy of about fifteen years until he clambered into the cab and spoke to him.

"How do you do, Mr. Bennett?" shouted the boy in order to make himself heard above the hissing of the locomotive.

The engineer looked up quickly, returning the lad's salutation and sticking out his grimy hand for the boy's own.

"Well, I declare. How do you do, Bennie?" he said. "I am glad enough to

see you. When I wrote your father that if you would meet me here I would take you in the cab nearly across the state of Kansas, I was not at all sure that you would come, but I am glad enough to see you. How are your folks? Like the West, and roughing it, do they?"

So the engineer visited as he finished making the locomotive ready for another lap of the long run, while our friend, Bennie Anderson, for it was none other, watched him with wide-open eyes.

It was a great stroke of good luck by which he was to get this long ride in the cab with the engineer upon this eventful trip.

The engineer and his father had been great friends way back in Indiana, and the engineer had remembered that the Andersons had settled in Kansas about a hundred miles from the Union Pacific tracks, so he had sent the invitation to Bennie to make a trip with him in the cab.

Again the engineer opened the throttle a little, and the wheels began to move slowly. Faster and faster they turned, bumping over the switches, taking them out into the darkness on the long eventful run, but now two pairs of eyes followed the long red shaft of light that streamed ahead along the gleaming rails.

In the meantime our old friend Buck, the King of all the Bison in the northern herd, was assembling his mighty host upon one of the north branches of the Platte. It was an army that Hannibal or Napoleon might well have been proud of. No mere man ever commanded such a host. This riderless cavalry of the plains was countless. Perhaps there were a million head in Buck's immediate herd and perhaps there were three million. Who shall say just how many?

There were seasoned stub-horned old bulls, who had seen twenty-five summers

come and go, and there were frisky young bullocks just learning to fight. There were old cows and young heifers, calves and yearlings, all sleek with the good feeding in this land of plenty.

As a general thing, they were peaceable enough among themselves, and until the robe-hunters came, they really had everything their own way on the plains. True, the gray pack always scouted upon their flanks to pick up sick stragglers, or those that had been wounded, but this merely served to make the herd more hardy, for it weeded out the weak. It was the law of the survival of the fittest.

The Indians slaughtered a few thousand or perhaps tens of thousands of head each year, but that was not a drop in the waters of the Missouri compared with their great number.

Starvation and cold rarely thinned their numbers, for they were very hardy. Their

robes were thick so they could stand the most inclement weather, and they could paw away the snow and subsist upon frozen grass where domestic cattle would have starved.

At about the same hour, when the proud Flyer upon the great railroad crossed the river and came into Kansas, Buck came out upon a high butte where a great number of his army could see him.

Upon his back rode Shep, erect, proud and filled with excitement. Perhaps now Buck would go home with him to their master, for this was always the first thought of the faithful dog.

From the crest upon which they stood Shep could see buffalo in every direction,—to the north, to the east, and to the west. To the south there were but a few stragglers, for that was the direction in which they were to travel, once the King gave the word to start.

Now by that I do not mean that he would give any vocal command or any orders that you or I could have heard or understood. But there is an understanding among great flocks of fowls and herds of the wild beasts that you and I do not understand. It is not speech or command given by any sound. If I were to tell you that Buck had lieutenants among all the minor herds that composed the great herd, it would hardly be true in the usual sense of the word; yet in another sense it was true. There were leaders in all the smaller herds and these were dominated by Buck. He gave them no commands, yet they knew what he wanted them to do. He stood upon the top of his butte, and his will went forth in vast waves of authority. The actions and the movements of each small herd was communicated to that next to it and thus the impulse ran like a tidal wave through the entire herd.

From where Buck stood, upon his throne at the top of the butte, to the utmost straggling end of his herd, it was forty miles. For forty miles up and down the creek his mighty army rested. For six or eight miles to each side it spread out upon the plains. Yet any movement in the front would have been known at the rear in a surprisingly short time. How the intelligence could have traveled so far and fast would have been a mystery.

For perhaps ten minutes Buck stood upon the crest of his hillock looking off across his kingdom at his subjects; then he slowly turned his nose southward and started at a leisurely trot toward the land of sunshine and better feed.

On every side his subjects followed his lead. All headed southward and all trotted after their King,—old bulls and cows, heifers, calves and yearlings, a mighty concourse, impelled by some instinct as old

as their kind, that taught them self-preservation and led them blindly yet surely to the best feed and water.

For a quarter of an hour they trotted slowly, but the pace was not swift enough for Shep, who was greatly excited by the host of dark-moving heads that he beheld on every side; so he began barking in his sharp imperative way, just as he had done in the old days when he rode the bison to the creek for water.

In obedience to his four-footed driver, Buck broke into a clumsy gallop. The mighty host on every side followed his example, and Shep gazing about, wide-eyed and excited, could see all around, as far as the eye could reach, innumerable black shaggy heads all bobbing up and down.

What fun it was! Louder and more imperiously he barked at Buck, who increased his pace to a pounding gallop, clumsy but

surprisingly fast, considering his size and weight.

Then all the tens of thousands of black heads began bobbing rapidly in unison with his, and the sound of their hoofs was like the heaviest thunder. It made the solid earth to tremble and quiver. It raised a cloud of dust that finally hung like a dark pall over the Thundering Herd.

As the herd increased its pace and the excitement of the headlong gallop gripped them, they became wild with this one idea of flight,—to gallop, and gallop to the ends of the earth. Over or through anything that was in their way. Unmindful of precipice or quagmire, of men's bullets or any obstruction that he might put in their way. Insensate, impervious to everything. A battery of heavy artillery would hardly have caused them to turn.

Thus while Buck and Shep led the

Thundering Herd toward the track of the Union Pacific, Bennie and his friend the conductor ran the new locomotive drawing the Flyer on its record-breaking trip from Chicago to the coast.

For more than two hours they had been running close to the river where there was an easy grade and no cuts or fills, when presently the train shot around a sharp curve preparatory to crossing five miles of open prairie, the track leaving the river in order to save distance.

The moon, which had been obscured for the first part of the evening, was now shining brightly and it was almost as light as day. As they came out into the open prairie, Bennie noticed that the landscape seemed dotted with dark figures which constantly bobbed about as though in motion. At first he thought he was dreaming, so he rubbed his eyes and looked again, but they were still there. Not only were they

bobbing about in the distance, but they were momentarily coming nearer.

Almost before he had time to realize what it was that agitated the landscape, the dark shapes were all about them. The figures, which a moment before had looked small and insignificant, now loomed large; and in a flash the truth dawned upon him. It was the Thundering Herd in mad flight across the tracks directly in front of them.

"Stop her, Mr. Bennett, stop her," he yelled, reaching in his excitement for the throttle. "It is the Thundering Herd; there are millions of them. We can never get through them."

Mr. Bennett, who was usually a cautious driver, had seen buffalo upon the track before, but they had been merely small bands that had always fled at the approach of the train.

So in answer to Bennie's outcry, he threw the throttle wide open and shouted back to

the frightened boy, "Now watch and see what the old girl will do to them. I have had buffalo upon the track before."

The great engine panted and throbbed as its piston felt the redoubled blast of steam and rushed forward on its death-dealing work.

There was a dull thud upon the cow-catcher and a little yellow bison calf was thrown fifty feet into the air, to fall a quivering mass of crushed flesh and broken bones by the track. Thud, thud, on the cow-catcher again, and a heifer rolled one way and a bull the other, both mangled and torn and dead as stones. Then the engine struck a bunch which had jammed upon the track ahead of them, thinking to escape by running along the track. There was grinding of bones and sinew, and blood was everywhere, but since such a soft mass as this could not be cut or run over, or pushed aside, it ground under the wheels and piled

up ahead. It was a substance that could not be bent or broken or diverted, so it did its fatal work. The mighty engine, weighing more than twoscore tons, slid from the rails and there was such a bumping, and pounding and ripping of ties and crashing of glass as even the old engineer, who had been in more than one wreck before, had never seen. For four hundred feet, the long train pounded over the roadbed, the locomotive and two of the forward cars going upon the ties, and then it came to a dead stop,—halted upon the prairie hundreds of miles from any wrecking train or other relief, ignominiously halted by the Thundering Herd.

Bennie and Mr. Bennett picked themselves up from the cab-floor and saw that no bones were broken. Although they had been terribly shaken up, yet they had miraculously escaped without any serious injury. Their first common impulse was to

look out of the shattered cab-window along the track ahead. It was black with bison as far as the eye could reach, all galloping madly across the tracks in their precipitate flight southward.

"My God, what a sight!" gasped the astonished engineer. "I should think that all the buffalo upon these plains had been bunched right here upon the track within half a mile of us."

"No," replied Bennie. "It is not that at all. There are millions of them. It is the Thundering Herd. I have seen it before. This herd may stretch for miles to the north.

"Look, Mr. Bennett, look," the boy fairly shrieked, gripping his friend's arm and pointing with his outstretched hand directly ahead of them.

The engineer turned his head just in time to see a mighty bison, larger and taller than his fellows, loom up darkly against the

moon which was just setting in the western sky. Like a black mountain the huge bull flashed across the bright spot in the heavens as he cleared the track at a jump and was gone among the crowding, jostling mass. But in that instant both Bennie and the engineer clearly saw silhouetted against the sky the dark outline of a dog sitting erect upon the buffalo's back.

"Great jumping horn-spoon!" gasped the astonished engineer. "What was that? Did you see that dog, or wolf, or something upon that buffalo's back?"

But Bennie uttered not a word. A great lump filled his throat. Tears were rolling down his cheeks,—tears of both pride and pain.

"That's old Buck and Shep," he sobbed as soon as he could make himself heard. "They are both mine, but I won't ever see them again.

"My, but wa'n't they grand! How proud

Shep did look, and wasn't Buck as big as a mountain!"

At first Mr. Bennett thought the boy had gone daft but Bennie finally told him the story of Buck and Shep, and how he had last seen them several months before, Buck galloping away to the creek, going for a drink, as he thought, and faithful Shep going to bring him back. To all of which the old engineer could only ejaculate, "Well, I'll be blowed! I'll be blowed!"

For nine hours the splendid express train stood impotent upon the tracks while the countless host from the vast plains thundered by.

The doors at the end of the cars were locked and barricaded and men, their revolvers drawn, stood in readiness to repel any attempt on the part of the bison to invade the train. Occasionally a venturesome bull or a frenzied heifer would clamber wildly over the platforms between the cars,

but after a little the herd split at the train and ran around each end. Once they got started this way, all went after the leaders.

One incident there was, which was quite out of the ordinary and threw the passengers in one of the coaches into a frenzy for a few moments. This was when a buffalo bull lost his head and ran crashing into one of the plate-glass windows. He could only get his head and shoulders through, and after one or two futile attempts to jump into the car, backed out and went around like his fellows, but he made a striking and terrifying picture, his massive head with its long black beard framed in the shattered window.

It was ten or eleven o'clock when the train had run into the midst of the Thundering Herd, and day was breaking in the east when the last of the stragglers went by. Truly it was a strange and bewildering procession,—one that those who saw it never forgot.

One evening about a week after the Flyer and the Thundering Herd had disputed the right of way upon the Kansas plains, a small band of Pawnee Indians, a hundred miles to the south, were sitting about their camp-fires. They had participated in a glorious buffalo hunt that day, and each brave was telling in turn his experiences, and boasting of his deeds.

Eagle Feather was speaking. "I see mighty bull buffalo," he said. "Big as two, and on his back a wolf sit, like he grow there."

The Cuiyote blew a wreath of smoke contemptuously at Eagle Feather and hissed, "Big lie."

"No lie," retorted Eagle Feather. "I shoot at wolf upon buffalo's back, and arrow stick in his back."

Tall Sycamore, the old chief, took his pipe from his mouth and looked scornfully at the speaker. "Fool," he hissed. "That

bison bad medicine. That wolf bad medicine. They bring trouble to the lodge of Eagle Feather. His squaw no more bear him pappoose. His son die by his father's camp-fire. No more the bison bring meat to his lodge. All night the wolf howl by his wigwam. Eagle Feather fool."

Bennie returned home after his eventful trip in the cab with Mr. Bennett, and told the strange tale of the wreck, and also Shep's and Buck's part in the night's proceedings. Although he repeated the story over and over, Mr. Anderson could hardly credit it, and thought he had been mistaken. "I do not believe we will ever see either Buck or Shep again," he said.

The following evening they were sitting about a cheerful fire in the stone fireplace in the kitchen, and Bennie was again telling the story. It was a favorite theme and they could not let it rest.

He had just finished and was declaring

stoutly as usual that he had seen Buck and Shep, when there came a soft whine at the door. Bennie sprang up and threw it wide open, when, to the utter astonishment of all, poor Shep fell across the door-sill into the room and lay panting upon the floor.

Bennie picked him up in his arms and laid him down gently by the fire. Food and water were brought and when he had eaten and drunk, the exhausted dog seemed better, but he was nearly dead with hunger and pain.

One hind-leg hung limp and he whimpered as soon as Mr. Anderson put his hand upon it. Bennie poked the hair upon the rump away carefully and found a bad wound, inflamed and filthy, with a cruel Indian arrow head sticking in the fleshy portion.

So Eagle Feather had told the truth after all. He had really shot at the wolf, and badly wounded him. It was weeks before

Shep could again use his leg as before, but he recovered rapidly, and the petting and attention that he received from the family and all who heard of his adventure was enough to spoil him.

Shep himself, however, did not seem to be quite easy in his mind. In his dumb dog way he seemed to be trying to tell Bennie something. But his young master told him as best he could that it was all right and that he knew Shep would have brought Buck back if any dog in the world could.

CHAPTER VII

BOOTS AND SADDLES

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EIGHT years have now passed since that eventful night when old Buck and the Thundering Herd had held up the Flyer upon the great trans-continental railroad for nine hours, while its own stupendous battalions passed. During that time pitiful changes had come to the Thundering Herd, which was now no longer large enough to thunder.

The coming of another railroad farther north than the first to span the continent, and the many boats plying far up the Missouri, had opened up the fine grazing-grounds of the northern herd to the robe-hunters. Thousands of men went forth every year, each with a half-dozen packhorses, and several skinners to butcher buffalo. All

along the steamboat wharves, and upon the platforms at the different depots the skins were piled up like cord-wood, just as they had been a few years before in Arkansas and Indian Territory.

From point to point the hunted bison fled, his grazing-grounds gradually narrowing down, and his numbers decreasing by millions each year. Finally he was driven entirely out of Kansas and Nebraska and partially out of what is now South Dakota, taking refuge in North Dakota and Montana. But even here he was pursued. There was to be no rest for him as long as he wore that thick warm robe, which could be made to serve man in so many ways.

The Indian had killed him merely for food and utensils, but the white man slaughtered him wastefully for the hide. Often he killed more than he could skin, and the robe rotted on its wearer.

Still from point to point they were pur-

sued until there only remained a few scattered small herds of a few hundred head each in Montana. Then something befell that sounded the death-knell of what few head there were left in the United States.

It was all because the Great White Father at Washington was angry at the red man, whom the whites had hunted from reservation to reservation almost as persistently as they had the buffalo. The White Father's soldiers had been killed in a battle called the Little Big-horn, and he could not wreak his vengeance upon the Indian, because he ran so fast, and would not stay still to be thrashed, so the White Father determined to punish the Indian by cutting off his supply of meat. If he could not subdue him in any other way, he could starve him.

It was in June of 1876 that a jaded trooper had risen in his stirrups at four in the morning, after an all night's ride and

sounded the charge for the disastrous battle of the Little Big-horn.

Half an hour later he and all his comrades, in General Custer's immediate command, were lying dead upon mother earth. They had died like good soldiers, the ground about each man being sprinkled with empty cartridges, but Sitting Bull and his braves had been too many for them. Now the bison was to suffer because the Indian had fought his white brother.

Troop E from Fort Blank in Kansas was on its way to Northern Montana, where, among the Black Hills, the last of the bison had taken refuge. The troop had orders to find and destroy all of the bison that were left, and thus bring the red man, whose buffalo had always been his chief means of subsistence, to terms.

To one of the troopers this was a mournful errand. Bennie Anderson, now called Benjamin, for he had grown to a stalwart

man of six feet, had joined the cavalry two years before, and he now rode with the rest of the troop into the Montana mountains upon this bloody and unnecessary quest.

The boy had inherited rather weak lungs and his parents had advised this change, thinking that the exposure and the out-of-door life of the trooper would be beneficial to him. The change had worked wonders, and he was now one of the hardiest of the troopers.

For weeks they had been on the march, making thirty or forty miles a day. At first it had been over the gently undulating prairie, checkered by wooded creeks, but as they came into Montana through the little Missouri country, the land was wild and picturesque.

It abounded in rugged mountain chains, intervaled by deep, slumbrous valleys. Turbulent streams and broad rushing rivers swept on their way; rivers as mag-

nificent as the storied rivers of the old world over which the tourist raves, yet in our own great country they were almost unknown to the geographer. Game of many kinds abounded, and each day a half dozen men were detailed to ride ahead and shoot enough for the troop. Bear, both black and grizzly; deer, of both black tail and white tail variety; and the more lordly elk, abounded. Grouse were flushed on all sides, so the menu of the troopers was varied and suited to the taste of an epicure.

Each evening a camping-place was selected by two or three troopers who had gone ahead for that purpose, and twenty or thirty white tents were pitched. Then the horses were picketed for the night and soon the odor of broiling venison or bear-steak came to the keen nostrils of the troopers who always carried their appetites with them upon such occasions as these.

Presently they could all be seen standing about eating venison and hardtack and drinking steaming coffee. After supper great camp-fires were kindled and the troopers played cards, told stories and had a generally gay time until taps sounded. Then in a few minutes the noisy company would have all disappeared, with the exception of the sentry, who paced steadily up and down watching the stars and listening to the night sounds of this wilderness.

Although it was only late October, yet they had not penetrated far into Montana when a heavy snowfall overtook them. It was a soft, sticky snow about two feet on the level, but in some of the gulches it was piled up many feet deep. The day after the storm it grew warm again and all the mountain streams in these steep, shut-in valleys ran riot.

Such conditions added greatly to the

work of the soldiers, and what had been merely pleasure before now became heart-breaking labor. They could not make over half the distance they had made in the good weather. All day from five o'clock in the morning until after sunset they floundered along, for they now had to make longer days, if they were to accomplish that for which they came.

At night men and horses were completely worn out. Often the troopers fell asleep with their mess-plates in their hands. To add to the difficulty it was now hard to find feed for the horses. Within a day or two the south slopes were again bare of snow, but the grass was soggy, frozen stuff, and the mounts would not have eaten it had they not been so famished.

But good luck or ill had ordained that they were near to their journey's end as far as the march north was concerned, for the fifth day after the coming of the snow,

when they had seriously considered turning back, they located the bison.

They had taken refuge in a series of deep, narrow valleys, between two high mountain chains, which rose above them on each side into the clouds. The sides of these valleys, beginning about half-way up, were heavily timbered, but along the bottom and on the lower slope there was good green feed. They were so sheltered from the wind and the cold that it seemed twenty degrees warmer than the outside country.

They had located the fugitives just at dusk, so nothing could be done that night.

The following morning reveille sounded before sunrise, and snatching a hasty meal, the bugler sounded boots and saddles and they were off.

A part of the troop went to the very upper end of the most northerly intervale, while a few were stationed along the sides

of the mountains to prevent the escape of the buffalo in that direction. Then the drive began. It was not long before the roar of sharp carbines and the crack of army revolvers echoed almost ceaselessly across the valleys.

Some of the bison fled up the valley, only to run into the bunch of troopers stationed at its head; others fled up the steep slopes, but were easily shot as they clambered laboriously upward. There were a medley of sounds that echoed that day in these deep, peaceful valleys, where the voice of a white man had scarce ever been heard before. Mingled with the roar of the carbine and the crack of the revolver, was the sound of galloping horses and terrified buffalo.

There were the angry bellows of old bulls brought to bay at some precipitate cliff and caused to turn and fight; the high-keyed mournful lowing of anxious cows who feared for their calves; and the pitiful

bleating of their offspring as they saw their mothers pitch headlong and fall kicking in the new snow. Blood was everywhere; even little rivulets, that trickled down the sides of the mountains, ran red.

Nor was this battle, the last fight of the great herd, now barely five hundred, entirely one-sided. Occasionally an old bull or a desperate cow mortally wounded charged home; then the troopers had to get out of the way or some one got hurt.

As a result of these death charges, one trooper was lying in camp with a broken leg and two fractured ribs, while two horses lay dead among buffalo. Four others had been so badly injured that they were useless, and were now tethered in camp.

Colonel Roosevelt, as well as several other hunters of big game, is of the opinion that a wounded buffalo is one of the most dangerous animals to face that there is.

By the time that the setting sun painted the mountain tops as red as the United States soldiers had made the snow in the valley, their work of destruction was nearly finished. They had raked the canyons from end to end. A few buffalo had escaped, some charging through their ranks in spite of bullets, while others escaped up the steep side of the mountains where the soldiers had thought they could not climb.

These long-hunted buffalo had become almost as expert mountain-climbers as the bighorn sheep, although they were naturally plains animals.

Major K., the commander of the troop, sat upon his horse on a little rising ground near the center of the upper valley. He was examining the sides of the surrounding mountains with his glass in search of any of the fugitives that they might have overlooked.

Presently he espied an old bull, a monarch of his kind, about a third of the way up the mountainside. He was standing in plain view looking down upon them. The major called Benjamin Anderson, the trooper who happened to be nearest to him, and pointed out the buffalo.

"You go up and finish him," he said. "I guess he is the father of the whole bunch."

Ben, as the troopers called him, was a good soldier although his heart was not in this bloody work. So he went to execute his officer's command.

The young trooper rode his jaded horse slowly up the slippery side of the mountain as far as he could, and then throwing the bridle-rein over his neck, proceeded on foot the rest of the way.

He had to go carefully as the snow was beginning to freeze, and it crunched with considerable noise under his feet. It was

also hard to keep from sending it slipping down the steep banks.

At first he could not locate the old bull, having lost sight of him in the ascent. He was rather in hopes that the bison had made good his escape, when he spied him standing just as they had seen him a few minutes before.

Cautiously he crept forward. He had left his carbine strapped to the saddle and had only the army revolver with him. This, however, was quite a deadly weapon, although it was necessary to get very close to kill an animal as tough as a bison. When hunting the buffalo on the plains, the rider usually comes up close to the bison's side before trying to shoot him with a revolver.

Benjamin continued to creep carefully forward, going behind trees as much as he could until within a hundred feet of the old monarch, and then raised the revolver to shoot.

The officer, a hundred yards below in the valley, was watching him and saw him lift the revolver, and then lower it as though uncertain.

Again he lifted the weapon and again it fell to his side. The officer uttered an exclamation of astonishment and disgust, but his bewilderment was still greater when he saw the young man start slowly toward the old bull, holding out his hands as he went.

He would go ten or twenty feet and then stop and hold out his hand again. The officer thought he heard him giving a low cattle-call but was not sure. The young man had certainly gone daft. In another minute he would be trampled and hooked to death and it would serve him right for his folly.

To the utter amazement of the watching cavalryman in the valley, Bennie continued to advance toward the old bull until he was within ten paces of him, and the buffalo

made no move to flee from him. He surely must be mortally wounded. That was the explanation of the strange proceeding.

But even this theory was upset presently, as the trooper was going forward again step by step. Surely he knew that a wounded bison was more to be feared than almost any other form of big game. Well, he was a fool. That was all there was about it.

But he did not come to harm, as far as the officer could determine, at that distance, although he went up to within a yard of the fugitive and held out his hand.

The next move in this strange proceeding fairly took away the breath of the watcher in the valley below, for the old bull actually took two steps toward the young man, and holding out his great shaggy head, with its long black beard, put his huge muzzle in the hand of the trooper.

For five minutes they stood thus, the man rubbing the bull's nose and the bull licking

the salt sweat from his hand, and nosing him over.

Then, after giving his nose a final pat, the trooper turned and began descending the mountainside.

Presently he came riding slowly back to his officer, and the major thought there was a strange look upon his face.

As soon as he got within speaking distance the officer's wrath broke forth.

"Why, in the name of the devil, when I send you to do a thing don't you do it? This comes mighty near being insubordination. What kind of a performance did you call that up there anyway? Why didn't you shoot him?"

"I couldn't shoot that particular bull, major, if I was to be court-martialed for not doing it," choked the young man. "Why, sir, you do not know what you are asking of me. Major, when that bull was a little fuzzy yellow calf, he used to come up

to me and I would put my arms about his neck and lay my cheek against his face, and rub his nose and pull his soft ears, while he licked the salt sweat from my hand just as you saw him do a few minutes ago. He would follow me all over the farm like a dog and I could call him as far as he could hear my voice. When he became a sturdy young bull I used to ride him on long trips across the prairies. Why, I have ridden him more than a thousand miles. He and I have broken hundreds of acres of bottom-land together. There was never an animal upon the farm that I loved as I did him, with the possible exception of my old dog Shep. That bison and Shep were inseparable when the dog was a pup and the bull was a calf. We found him while we were crossing the plains twelve years ago, and we brought him up. I wouldn't shoot him for the world. I couldn't do it anyway. It would be a crime at my hands."

"Well," ejaculated the astonished officer, "of course that makes a difference, but I didn't count on your having any bosom friends among the bison."

The young soldier reached for the officer's glass and focused it upon the spot where he had left Buck. He was not there, but far up the mountainside he could see him laboriously climbing to freedom. Out and in among the scrub-pines he wound his way. For a moment the young man watching breathlessly would think he had lost him and then he would reappear again higher up.

But the shadows of coming night gathering each minute among the pine glooms on the mountain top made it hard to distinguish the dark form of the old King.

At last he was but a shadow himself, among the lighter shadows, a dark spot that went higher and higher into the protecting folds of the mantle of coming night.

Then the shadows swallowed him and he was gone forever as far as the young trooper was concerned.

Henceforth he would be but a shadow out of the shadeland of memory, a phantom that would come and go with the years when Ben recalled the old days upon the farm,—those dear old boyhood days that fled away from the present as Buck had fled away from the soldiers.

"I guess we had better ride back to camp now," said the major kindly. "Supper and a warm fire will do us all good."

"How did you know this was your particular buffalo?" continued the major, as he turned his horse and led the way back to camp, for he was not yet quite convinced.

"It was in this way," replied Benjamin. "You see the last fall that I had him he was restless and did not act as he used to, and I half imagined that he might run away, although I did not really think he

would, so I put a tin tag with my name upon it in his ear. It was our regular cattle tag. When I raised my revolver to shoot, I noticed that the sunlight fell upon something bright which glittered and was very conspicuous against his dark head. At the same instant the thought of the tin tag that I had put in old Buck's ear flashed through my mind. And not a minute too soon for my finger had almost pressed the trigger."

"Well," ejaculated the officer, "that does seem to settle it without a doubt."

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAST PISKUN

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THE LAST PISKUN

THE piskun was a trap upon a large scale by means of which nearly all the plains Indians from Texas to the Dakotas ensnared the buffalo.

This was in the primitive days before they got firearms and could slaughter the herd as rapidly as the white man did.

Not only was it necessary to kill a lot of bison for food, but this useful animal served the red man in so many other ways that a great number had to be killed each year. At the present time it is said that no part of the cattle that are slaughtered in the great slaughter-houses at Chicago are wasted. So it was in the primitive days; nearly every part of the buffalo was used, only the offal going to the scavengers.

Just to mention one item will serve to show how true this was. Each year all the lodges in the villages were made new. Not only did they procure new lodge poles, but all the skins covering them were thrown away and new ones provided. These were tanned bison-skins taken from the cows. Some of the chiefs' lodges were quite spacious, requiring fifteen or twenty skins to cover them, so this want alone necessitated the killing of many head.

The piskun varied in different parts of the country, although the general plan was the same. This consisted in getting the buffalo into an enclosure or corral, where they could either be killed with bow and arrow, or perhaps they were rushed over a cliff where they fell in a struggling mass.

In the latter case a spot was chosen near the buffalo's feeding-ground where there was a deep canyon or coulee. From this precipitate bank two diverging wings were

builded far out on the prairies, becoming farther apart as they extended from the cliff. At the latter point they nearly converged so as to act as a chute.

When all was in readiness most of the members of the village stationed themselves behind these diverging wings, where they were carefully concealed, while a few of the warriors went forth upon the plains to tole the buffalo into the death-trap.

Foremost of these was a medicine-man who had fasted all night and prayed and supplicated all the gods and devils that he knew of for success. While he was gone upon this expedition, his wife must stay in the lodge, and not so much as look out for fear of breaking the spell.

He would advance slowly toward the feeding bison. Sometimes he was dressed in fantastic garb to attract their attention, and frequently he would be inside a buffalo-skin, made up in some semblance of the real

bison, but this representation was usually crude.

Finally the attention of the buffalo would be attracted by the strange figure coming toward them. One and another would look up from their feeding. Finally one would start to go toward the strange figure, for the buffalo were very curious in the old days before they learned to fear everything that they could not understand.

As the curious buffalo advanced, the medicine-man would walk slowly toward the outspread wings of the piskun. Other bison would follow the first and soon scores would be following the medicine-man into the waiting wings of the trap.

When this movement was well under way, a score or two of mounted warriors, who had been waiting upon their ponies for the purpose, would ride slowly up along the sides of the herd, to help guide them into the chute, but they did not hurry them

at this stage of the game until they were fairly within the piskun.

Then, when the leader had covered perhaps half of the distance toward the pitfall, all of the Indians of the village, including women and children, would rise up along the wings of the chute and make a great noise. Men beat upon tom-toms, women shrieked and waved bright objects, and the children yelled with delight, all tingling with the excitement, and this would start the herd running.

The Indians along the flank of the herd would now come riding upon their ponies, yelling and making all the noise possible. At this point the herd would be stampeded and begin to gallop frantically. As it came nearer to the end of the chute, the buffalo crowded close together, and then with a neck-breaking rush all went over the cliff where hundreds were killed if the drive was successful. The Indians thus in an hour or

two, or perhaps half a day, secured as many bison as they could by the ordinary means in a month.

There were other forms of the piskun but this one was the most in use. Upon the broad plains where there were no coulees, it was necessary to build an enormous corral, closed on all but one side. Here, instead of being eight feet high, it was only four, and a broad causeway was built running up to this low place in the strong fence.

When all was in readiness, the Indians then went upon the plains to the buffalo's feeding-ground and toled the herd up to this corral, driving it slowly up the causeway until they at last all jumped into this death-pen. Then the Indians would slip up stealthily and close up the low place in the fence, thus trapping the herd. They were obliged to begin the killing process almost at once, for it was hard to build a fence

strong enough to hold the herd for long, once its fears were aroused.

In regions where there was no timber from which to build a corral, a still more spectacular manner of securing the buffalo was resorted to.

A large village would encamp in a circle completely surrounding the herd of bison. Then huge camp-fires would be builded and all the men, women and children would form a cordon, keeping the buffalo within the great circle. When all was in readiness the warriors of the village mounted upon their best ponies would ride slowly around the herd, gradually increasing their pace, until they had started the herd to running in a great circle within the cordon of camping Indians. This would finally take the form of a stampede, in which the foolish bison ran around and around until they were completely exhausted, when the warriors could kill with ease as many of the herd as they wanted.

This form of the piskun was not resorted to unless there was no timber near by with which to build the corral, as the buffalo frequently broke through the circle, or killed some of the women and children.

It must have been a striking sight. The great camp-fires, the warriors mounted upon their ponies, with their bright trappings, the Indian village, all animation, and inside the frantically running herd of thousands of buffalo galloping madly to death.

There has been some discussion among writers upon the American Indians as to whether the Indian toled the buffalo into the piskun or whether the Indian drove him. From a careful sifting of all the evidence, I am certain that the bison was always toled for the first part of the way at least. Any attempt to drive the herd at the start would have frightened it and defeated the end in view. George Bird Grinnell, who has hunted much with the Indians, is

of the opinion that the bison were always toled into the piskun, although they were finally run over the precipice where the slaughter took place.

After the Union Pacific Railroad cut asunder the great herd that had ranged from the Dakotas to Texas, the northern herd extended its operations farther to the north, ranging in the summer well up through the Canadian prairies toward Saskatchewan.

These Canadian prairies are even much more desolate than our own, for they are less undulating and broken. They are not as well-watered, and there is almost no timber along the watercourses, the rivers being only fringed with small willows. Here and there the land is dotted by a small lake, but the waters of these lakes are very bitter, and the shore is fringed with a salt-like crust, which proclaims the water alkali even before you taste it.

The feed upon these prairies, however, is

very good, being short, thick, fine bunch grass. Thus it came about that when the robe-hunters pressed the northern herd, then roaming in the Dakotas and Montana, too hard, many of the bison took refuge in the Canadian prairies and finally they did not go back, even when the cold winters swept down upon these desolate plains. More than the stinging blast and the cutting ice-storm, and the deep snow which covered the grass, they feared the hail from the white hunter's thunder-stick. Buck and his little band of fifty stragglers, who had escaped from the United States soldiers, were the last of the northern herd to leave the United States, and take refuge in Canada, where they found that their kind had been before them. Like the plains of the Dakotas, these Canadian prairies were furrowed by the buffalo path, leading from lake to river, and to the best feeding-grounds. The bison's rubbing posts were everywhere that a tree large

enough, or a boulder high enough for the purpose could be found.

But even there, in this comparatively wild country, the hunted bison could not rest secure for long. The white man had learned that these same plains would raise wheat. The land was new and full of the virtue of virgin soil, and the best of wheat could be had merely for the sowing and reaping. So they swarmed across the Canadian plains and took up homesteads, just as they had done in the central portion of the United States a generation before.

With the coming of the white man, the destruction of the bison again began. It was not so much of a slaughter as it had been in the robe-hunting days, but the herds were now only as one to ten thousand compared with what they had been in the old days, so the inroads of the Canadian farmers and hunters were too much for them, and they again had to move on.

Northward, still northward, they fled, old Buck leading the way as a wise King should. The few hundred buffalo, left of all the millions, he still held together and in a straggling band they fled to the country of the Saskatchewan. Days, weeks and months they journeyed until they left the treeless plains far behind and came to the timber belt, where there was timber along all the watercourses. Not such trees as they had known in the southland, however. Instead, there were shimmering silver poplars, and graceful white birches, dwarfed Jack-pines, and quivering aspens.

Beneath them in the green moss, grouseberries, wintergreen and low bush cranberries, all blushed red. The air was redolent with the fragrance of the witch-hazel, while the more pungent odor of the wild cherry filled the nostrils.

It was to such a land as this, upon the high shelving banks of the broad Saskatch-

ewan, to which Buck finally led his little herd.

It seemed like a goodly land into which they had come, with more timber, making cover in which to hide; also more food and larger rivers, for the bison loves above all things to wade and wallow, some varieties, like the water buffalo of the Philippines, being partially aquatic.

It would seem as though they might rest now. They had come to a land of plenty, with good water and good thick cover in which to hide, but even here they were not safe, for they had come again within reach of their first slayer, the red man.

Not over a hundred miles distant, as the crow flies, was Fort Edmonton, where was located the trading-post of the Hudson's Bay Company. In fact, that great company not only dominated the northern portion of this Saskatchewan country, but also lonely Athabasca to the north. Where it

was too cold and desolate for other men, there you might find the trappers of the Hudson's Bay Company. For the beaver, the muskrat, the mink, the otter, and all the other furred denizens of the wilderness dwelt here.

Clustered about Fort Edmonton, like a lot of barnacles upon a great ship, were the teepees of the Cree Indians. In fact, a horde of Indians and half-breeds (breeds as they were called) always hung about the fort. For a part of the year they trapped and for the rest spent their money for whiskey and tobacco and hunted and fished.

It was into the favorite hunting-ground of the Cree Indians, the aborigines of the upper Saskatchewan country, that Buck had unwittingly led his little herd, so while they luxuriated in this new-found land of milk and honey the Crees discovered their coming and soon were busy laying plans for their destruction.

It was late October and the blue haze of Indian summer was over the land of the Saskatchewan. Nearly all the ducks had winnowed past, as the cold weather comes early in this northland. The muskrat had builded his house and was in readiness for winter. The little herd of buffalo, over which Buck still reigned, for he had still been King all through the troublesome days when they had fled from the United States, was sleek with the good feeding of these rich lands. Their coats were long and glossy and their ribs were covered with fat.

They wandered about upon the prairies or secreted themselves in the small timber along the affluents of the Saskatchewan. Upon the banks of this broad, picturesque river a large hunting-party of Crees were camped. They had come down two days before to slay this little herd, the last of the American bison. They could not be con-

tent with slaughtering a few, but must sate themselves with blood and kill the whole herd.

For two days they had been very busy, working as these lazy men rarely work, and everything was now in readiness.

They had chosen a spot for their piskun where a deep coulee ploughed a furrow nearly thirty feet deep through the prairies. At this spot the banks were almost perpendicular. They had felled trees across the chasm, using the white man's sharp axes, until they had formed a pen-trap a hundred feet long, fifty feet wide, and thirty feet deep. Once inside this pen no horned creature could escape, unless it was a bighorn sheep.

From this slaughter-pen they had builded wings running out into the prairies. At the immediate banks these wings were not more than ten feet apart, and here they were strong, builded like a stockade; but

farther out on the prairies they were a quarter of a mile apart, gradually diverging, and here they were formed by merely sticking brush in the ground, the slightest kind of a flimsy brush fence simply to mark the way the death path led.

Now in the cool of the evening the warriors sat about the camp-fire, telling of many buffalo runs in which they had participated in the old days when the bison were found in herds to the south as numerous as the stars of night, in the hunter's moon.

Big Wind, a grizzled old chief, headed the expedition. He had seen more buffalo runs than any Indian of the Cree nation. When he had been a young brave, he averred that the bison were as plentiful in the herds to the south as the sands upon the shore of the great waters.

Evil Eye, the dark medicine-man, was doing strange things in his lodge, for with-

out his incantations there was no certainty that luck would be with the hunt on the morrow. His squaw sat with her face toward the wall, and might not move from that position until after the run of the morrow.

Badger Tooth had the greatest repute of any among the Crees as a buffalo trailer, and he it was who, mounted upon his favorite cayuse, would lure the buffalo to their death.

The following morning, just about the time when that first faint shimmer came into the east, even before it grew pink and saffron, Badger Tooth, mounted upon a pinto that had been in many buffalo hunts, was pounding the prairie southward, going to locate the bison. But an hour before, two other warriors had gone away, one to the southeast, and the other to the southwest, each to make a large circle and come out to the south of the herd. The wind

was in the south so the trailer could work up to within seeing distance of the feeding buffalo without scaring them. Presently he came out on the plains within full view of the herd, but they got no scent of him, and as the bison's eyesight is not very good, were not frightened.

A few minutes before he had located his companions, who had gone southward in the early morning. They were in position and working slowly up toward the herd, but not too near, for they were on the windward side, and the scent carried far upon these open plains.

The Indian trailer had his blanket tied upon the end of a long stick and he waved it to and fro in the wind as he rode, so that it looked as though the winds blew it. These movements of the blanket were so continuous that he did not look much like a horseman to the feeding bison. Presently one of the lowered heads was raised, and

then another as though the fact of the presence had been communicated from one to another until finally a score of bulls were staring at the strange figure in the distance.

He had gotten their attention, so now was the time for the warriors in the south to appear. This they soon did, riding at a trot, and making considerable noise. Their scent was immediately carried to the herd and all heads were soon up and alarm was in all their movements.

At this point the buffalo trailer turned his horse and rode off to the north at a walk. Buck looked first at the strange figure and then to the south. In that direction was surely danger, for thence came both sounds and scents that were a menace. But this figure in front of them did not menace them. Perhaps it was another buffalo, a wise bison who might lead them to safety. So he began walking slowly after the figure, which he did not fully under-

stand. The figure ahead quickened its pace to a trot, and Buck quickened his also.

Sounds of real danger now came from the south, for a dozen warriors, who had been waiting upon the plains, concealed by a convenient swell, now closed in on both sides of the herd to help stampede it.

The figure ahead quickened its pace to a sharp trot. Buck followed suit, and slowly, like an avalanche, the entire cumbersome herd gathered headway.

They were now well within the outer end of the wings, and Buck scented danger on both sides of him, but the way ahead seemed clear, so he thundered on. And well he might scent danger behind the rapidly converging wings, for the entire village of the Crees, which had come down for the purpose that very morning, was waiting behind these screens, waiting until just the right moment when they should

add terror to the flying hoofs of the already thoroughly alarmed herd.

The buffalo trailer now leaned close to his pinto's neck and gave him the quirt. Maddened by the stinging lash, the pony galloped forward like the wind. He too knew the game, for he had led this death-race before and really needed no urging. Head down and tail out straight, his long black beard sweeping the ground, old Buck galloped after him, pounding the earth with his ton of sinew and muscle.

The bulls behind bellowed to their companions to come on. Cows lowed plaintively to their calves, who crowded to the center of the herd for protection. Fear was in the air, fear was in the sod beneath their hoofs. This fear became frenzy when a score of warriors burst from concealment in their rear and stung the hindmost with flint-headed arrows, at the same time yelling like a score of red devils, which they really

were for the time. Simultaneously with that move all the waiting women and children rose up from behind the wings and screamed and waved blankets. Pandemonium had broken loose on every hand.

The fear in those thousands of galloping hoofs became frenzy. Madly, frantically they galloped. Safety was only to be had ahead.

A cloud of dust like a winding-sheet rose beneath those sharp-cutting hoofs, which beat the prairies with a roar like Niagara. Thus, all unconscious of its fate, fear-crazed, with what little sense they ordinarily possessed gone, the herd swept on to its doom.

The buffalo trailer now lashed his cayuse frantically. Full well he knew the risk that he was running. A misstep, a stumble by the pinto and he would be ground to pulp beneath that avalanche behind.

But the slight opening, through which he was to escape to safety, was close at hand.

What if he should miss it, and fall into the death-trap that he had helped plan for the herd! Frantically he tugged upon the thong about the pinto's neck and dug his left leg into the pony's side. Faithful to the sign, like a flash the cayuse shot through the opening just in time to escape Buck's short horns.

The King saw the opening and the disappearing figure ahead, but not in time to follow. He was too cumbersome and the turn was too short for his great body. So he thundered on, the herd behind him each second becoming more closely wedged, for the frenzied cows and bulls were pressing forward like a landslide, lashed into their utmost pace by the yelling devils in their rear.

But to Buck's straining eyes, freedom seemed just ahead where the open prairie stretched and no foe seemed in sight.

At that instant the death-trap—broad,

Like a Flash, the Cayuse Shot Through the Opening

deep, and terrible—opened at his very feet. Luckily for the King, he was one jump ahead of the rest of the herd, and in the time to cover that one jump, he turned and crashed through the parapet at the very brink of the chasm.

But those who came behind him were not so lucky as he, for they had not time to turn. The tide behind them was too deep and too strong. So struggling and frantically pawing the air, they went over the brink,—one, three, five at a time, in mad chaos piling higher and higher.

Bellows, groans, moans and deep grunts filled the air: the deep bass of agonized bulls; the high-keyed wavering bawl of broken-kneed cows; and the pathetic bleating of calves, who had all been carried high upon the crest of this heaving tidal wave and then plunged to a horrible death in the depths below.

Into the death-chasm, spurred on by the

yelling Indians in their rear, they leaped, tumbled and rolled,—cows, bulls and calves, until there were no more to come. Of the entire herd, only half a dozen bulls that had broken away just before they entered the wings, and one who had followed Buck's lead through the gap he had made, alone had escaped.

When the last terrified bison had plunged to his doom, warriors, squaws and children all swarmed to the brink of this inferno, yelling like demons. Then the pandemonium increased tenfold, for the real killing began. Rifles and revolvers belched forth their deadly contents, and long arrows armed with stinging flint-heads sped from twanging bowstrings. Those in the death-trap, who had not been badly injured by their fall, ran frantically about seeking for some way out. But there was none,—only death on every hand.

For an hour the slaughter went on and

one by one the strugglers fell never to rise again. Finally all was over, and only the sound of dying bison came feebly up to the listening ears of the braves. Then the squaws, whose hour had come, descended into this arena of blood and began the skinning and cutting up of the meat.

That night there was a gorge in the village of the Crees that was memorable for many a year. All night the flesh-pots simmered over the fires, and the gorge went on. When all could eat no more, they lay down like glutted animals and slept, and their hearts were glad because their stomachs were full.

On the crest of a distant swell Buck turned and looked back for a second. He saw the dancing circle of yelling Indians leaping about the edge of the death-pen where something told him that his little herd floundered. One glance was enough for the King, who was a King no longer.

So he fled on, fear growing upon him with each league he left behind.

Through broad rivers he swam and up their precipitate banks he scrambled and galloped away to the north. Surely if he ran far enough in that direction he would reach a land which man had not penetrated.

Over broad stretches of prairies he fled, and through deep coulees where the trees stood green and inviting. Only when hunger impelled him, did he stop to feed; only when thirst, that he could not withstand, gripped his throat did he stop to drink.

Fear whispered to him in the wings of the wind; fear spoke to him in the whisper from the sod; fear murmured in the passing waters of each river; fear resounded in the very echoes of his own hoofs as he galloped over the plains. The flesh that had been thick upon his ribs left him, and he grew thin and lank. Far into each night he

fled, only stopping in lonely places, scores of miles from the haunts of men.

But as he fled, gradually the sense of fear grew less, for he no longer saw any indications of man. Upon the vast treeless barrens that he at last reached, or in the deep, swampy places, luxuriant with a tangle of green growing things, was no sign of his destroyer. Here again was good feed, feed that kept green long after the grass upon the barrens had withered, for Buck was just upon the edge of the Land of the Muskeg, the lonely domain of the Hudson's Bay Company, where only the trapper cared to penetrate. A lonely land, manless, and almost Godless it seemed, but peace was there and fear had been left far behind.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAND OF THE MUSKEG

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THE Land of the Muskeg is a lonely no man's country, far beyond the utmost northern borders of Saskatchewan. Few white men ever visit this land, as it is several weeks' journey by a small Hudson's Bay Company's steamer, and thence by canoe, and if you would go to the heart of this country you must travel on foot. Even when you arrive, there is not much to see ;—only a vast stretch of almost treeless barrens, or on the other hand deep, sequestered muskegs, tamarack fringed.

These muskegs are most of them many acres in extent, a sort of cross between a bog and a swale. They are overgrown with water-grasses, clinging mosses, and

low bush cranberries. Some of the way the ground beneath is like jelly, trembling and quivering as you approach, while in other places it is a black peat, where many a tree has been sucked down into the soft ooze.

This lonely country is threaded by many rivers, and dotted by numerous lakes; so it is the abode of all the little furred folk for whose sleek hides man has ever been so greedy.

There Umisk, the beaver, builds his strange, cunningly constructed dam across the stream, flooding the lowlands, and in the middle of his lake rears his symmetrical mud-house,—wise little Venetian, nearer to the ways of man in his mode of life than any other of God's creatures.

There Nekik, the otter, coasts down his slide upon his belly with as much delight and abandon as a boy might upon a new sled.

There Wuchusk, the musquash, whom

you may know better as the plain musk-rat, builds high his house of roots and grass against the coming of cold. When the winter winds howl outside, his strange abode will serve him both for food and shelter.

It is in this weird land that Pisew, the lynx, steals with stealthy tread over the new snow, his broad pads leaving an unmistakable track.

He is looking for Wapoose, the rabbit, who is food, in all but the plague year, for all the carnivorous four-footed creatures that creep and spring, and all the hungry beaks of the air. It is well that Wapoose's snow-shoe feet touch the snow light as thistledown and that his coat is white, else he might not withstand the war of extermination waged against him.

In this No Man's Land, Carcajous, the wolverine, toils with the traps of the breeds and Indians who scour the country for the

Hudson's Bay Company. With diabolical cunning he will spring their traps and eat the bait, or will raid their camps and destroy all that he cannot cache where he can find it again.

Only to the Hudson's Bay Company is this land of the barren and the muskeg valuable. To them it is an Eldorado, for it is the home of the fur folk.

If you were to find it upon the map, your finger would have to follow a long chain of lakes and rivers far to the north and there you would discover the name Athabasca. This then is the Land of the Muskeg.

It is a warm spring twilight in the Athabasca, for spring does come at last even in that far north country. The breath of the wind is sweet with spring odors, most pungent of which is the water willow. Marsh-birds are shrilling in the tamaracks, while an occasional seed-eater is balancing upon

the top of a dead weed, looking for his supper.

Out of the gray green twilight of the Muskeg, where it is always half day and half night, stalks a massive dark-brown figure. The coat of this strange figure is long and glossy, telling of good feed and plenty. Black glowing eyes look out from shaggy eyebrows at the peaceful scene, while from beneath the jowl a long thick black beard nearly sweeps the ground. This beard is rather unkempt, being filled with nettles and beggar's-lice.

The impression that one gets from this massive figure, with its heavy fore-quarters, and its massive head, is one of strength. This is a creature that would withstand anything, you would say. Yet this is not so, for this erstwhile King of the Plains has gone down before the rifle of man, where many a smaller, weaker creature has survived.

But what of this lone figure on the fringe of the Muskeg, standing there in a contemplative mood, chewing his cud neath the overhanging tamarack? He is our old friend Buck, the disinherited King of all the North American Bison that formerly ranged from Saskatchewan to Kansas. Here he stands upon the edge of the Muskeg, one of the few survivors of his species.

But his kingship has not yet quite fallen from him, for in and out among the Muskegs and upon the barrens, come and go fifty or a hundred buffalo, although their coats are longer and they are taller and rangier than of yore. They are the wood buffalo of the Athabasca, so says the naturalist, but you and I know that they are the remnant of the old King's great herd, fugitives from the mercy of man, escaped to a land so desolate and so forbidding that the white destroyer with his fire stick will not follow hence.

For five minutes the massive dark figure stands under the larch, chewing his cud; then slowly he turns, for all of his motions are slow, and fades into the gray gloom from whence he came, a shade among the shadows, the silent reproachful ghost of the Thundering Herd.

On the same day and almost the same hour that we last glimpsed old Buck in the Land of the Muskeg, a scene was being enacted a thousand or more miles to the south, upon a Kansas homestead, that connected the forlorn old buffalo with ties of peculiar tenderness to the past.

Two stalwart young men, Benjamin and Thomas Anderson, aged twenty-five and twenty-three years respectively, are carrying a wrinkle-faced, rusty-coated old dog out on the lawn and laying him down beside a newly-dug grave.

It needs but a glance at the anxious gray-haired face of the dog to assure you that he

is very old,—sixteen years, in fact, which is an extreme age for a dog.

It is none other than our old friend Shep,—he of the merry bark and the laughing face. Time, the omnivorous, has claimed him, and his friends, each with an ache in his heart of which he is not ashamed, have gathered to do him honor. For was he not one of them?

When had any member of the family a heartache, or a joy that they could hide from Shep? For sixteen years he had hung his tail when they were sorry and wagged it when they were glad,—a sure weather-vane of joy and sorrow in the Anderson family. So could they not well afford to mourn at the little new grave under the willow?

Half an hour before, stretched upon the kitchen floor with the family about, Shep had breathed his last. Even his last doggish impulse had been full of love for his friends.

As his life ebbed, each member of the family kneeled down for Shep's farewell kiss. Tenderly the dog's long affectionate tongue stole out and licked the hands of those whom he loved with a devotion that puts to shame the fidelity of mere man.

Thus with the scent of those dear hands that had caressed him, in his nostrils, the faithful dog had departed. Gone, who shall say where, but if love and devotion count for anything in the brute kingdom, he cannot be far from his master.

Even after his faithful nose could no longer distinguish the scent of his friends, the bushy brown tail upon the floor continued to whack, showing that the faithful dog's last impulse was to express more of that devotion which he still felt dimly as his dying impulse down in the dark and the cold.

When the tail had given its last faint flutter, the young men picked him up

tenderly and carried him forth, their parents bringing up the rear.

"What changes in our family Shep has lived to see," said Mrs. Anderson with a sob in her throat at the end.

"Yes, mother; he has seen us travel the long road from poverty to prosperity," said Mr. Anderson. "He was two years old, a frisky, frolicksome pup when we started in that old schooner, away back in Indiana, for the land of Kansas. Shep made the entire trip with us, and he was the very laughter of the family, always ready to grin and wag his tail."

"I never shall forget the night that you left Shep and me alone on the banks of the Missouri River, while you went back for mother and Tom," said Benjamin. "Shep seemed to know that I was half scared out of my wits, and he was continually telling me in his dog way, 'I'll take care of you.' I went to sleep with my head upon his side,

and one hand upon my rifle and I do not think that I ever slept better."

"What friends he and Little Bighead were!" put in Thomas. "How they would frisk and caper together! Faithless old Buck, what a scapegrace he turned out to be."

"No," said Mr. Anderson, "not faithless, but faithful. He was born in the great herd and it was as inevitable that he would return to it as that the spring which bubbles from the hillside should return to the sea whence it came."

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